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FROM ABRAHAM TO CHRIST
STUDIES IN THE THEISM OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT



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FROM ABRAHAM TO CHRIST

STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEISM
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Warburton Lectures

1923—1927

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CHAPTER I

A TEXT-BOOK OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

*My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ;
my heart and my flesh cry out unto the living God. PSALM lxxxiv. 2.*

THE subject of these lectures is "THE THEISM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT." Several lines of treatment might be adopted, of which perhaps the most obvious and natural is to sketch historically the growth of the conception of God in the Religion of Israel from its earliest beginnings to its full maturity. It is inevitable that there should be some employment of this genetic method, because the doctrine of God in the Old Testament shows a progressive development, and can be adequately appreciated only if it is studied as a growth. But historical treatment is here linked to the larger purpose of trying to show that the theism of the Old Testament is not "a creed outworn," but is to-day intensely alive, and provides the enduring foundation upon which our twentieth century thought of God must be built. To emphasize the abiding value of the conception of God in these Hebrew Scriptures, and to bring it into

living connection with our modern thinking, is one of the main aims of the lectures.

Can it be contended that there is no present need of enforcing the truth of the permanent value of the Old Testament? Can anyone deny that these Scriptures are to-day suffering eclipse? For those who really know what scholarship has done for the Old Testament there can be no doubt whatever about the permanent value of the latter. That value has been enormously enhanced by the labours of the scholars. The Old Testament lives as it has never lived before. Its large human element provides a background against which the divine element shines out in glowing colours. The critics have helped us to see what a marvellous set of writings we have in this varied literature. But criticism, perhaps, is in some danger of losing sight of the fact that the record, which it so patiently examines, is the record of an experience which throbs with life. Criticism of the text of the Old Testament is, of course, absolutely essential, and it must enter into minutest details. There must also be the most careful analysis of documents, with a view to determining their structure and date; and, when this preliminary work has been done, there will follow the

attempt to trace the development of ideas, social customs, ritual observances, and the like. In this way we shall be enabled by the use of a sympathetic, historical imagination, to think ourselves back into the moving story of the Hebrews. But if we stop there, we are missing that which is of most importance, the religious experience which the record enshrines. Perhaps it is the task of the theologian, and not of the critic, to bring out the religious lessons of the Old Testament; but the latter might do well to remember Professor Nairne's warning, the warning of one, who in a remarkable way keeps both his critical and his spiritual eye undimmed, in his delightful volume, *The Faith of the Old Testament*. "Criticism," he writes, "progressing with more and more minuteness, has discovered fresh difficulties which shock no longer, but weary people. The Old Testament has become (it almost seems) a matter of neither theology, devotion, nor enjoyment, but merely a text to be analysed."¹ Certainly the fact remains that in the minds of many an impression exists that criticism has destroyed the Old Testament as the record of a divine revelation, and has reduced it to a mass of legend or untrustworthy history. Even

¹ pp. 1, 2.

professed Christian teachers show a tendency to leave the Old Testament alone and to base their religious instruction exclusively upon the New Testament. Such a policy is surely disastrous. How can anyone hope to understand Christianity itself without some grasp of the great, preceding spiritual movement of which it is heir? How can the consciousness of Christ be understood without a knowledge of those writings which shaped His mind and purpose? And if there is a crying need, as assuredly there is, for popularizing the results of biblical scholarship, and getting rid once and for all of those false views about the Bible and Inspiration, which hang as a dead weight upon the necks of so many, and are still fastened as a yoke upon countless children in elementary and secondary schools, how can that need be met, unless teachers will study the Old Testament in the light of the best knowledge of to-day, and try to grasp its organic connection with the New Testament? Bring the Old Testament out into the open. Let criticism play upon it as fiercely as it will. Its imperishable spiritual worth will only be the more clearly revealed. Its doctrine of God will be found to rest on enduring truths, truths which shine like inextinguishable stars in the

heaven of human thought and aspiration.

It is in the light of these truths that we have to face those problems about God and man and the universe which haunt our minds to-day. Many of them are the same problems which haunted the Hebrew mind, and we shall do well to see what was the attitude of these old writers as they faced those problems, and what solution of them they had to offer. And if some of our problems are new, born of the fresh knowledge which we have acquired since the Bible was written, it will still be interesting to bring them to the Old Testament, to that unplumbed well of religious experience, to those who, being dead, yet speak to us about the Living God.

Let us begin our study of Old Testament Theism by noting some of the larger and more salient characteristics of this collection of writings. We will take first the point, that these Scriptures are the record of a religious experience. We have mirrored in the pages of the Old Testament the developing life of a nation, the life of the fields and the city and the council-chamber. Armies march to war and win, or are defeated. Men buy and sell in the markets, women tend the house at home. It is just the continuous story of the life of an

Eastern people. But over that whole complex existence religion throws its beam of light. The story of this nation was written by a succession of men to whom religion was the supreme interest. They believed and claimed that God was guiding and controlling the history of their nation in special ways. They saw His hand in the events which happened to them. They set out to interpret the past history of the nation in the light of this belief, seeking to bring out the religious lessons which that past contained. They were conscious that their nation had a vocation. They felt that they were called to be the instruments of a divine purpose, and a channel through which a divine revelation should flow. The thought of God is stamped everywhere on these Old Testament writings.

But there is more in the Old Testament than a religious interpretation of a national history. There is the record of the religious experience of individuals. We see them, men of flesh and blood like ourselves, wrestling with life's problems, but not one of them is an atheist. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." He did not believe with his intellect that there was no God; he merely made up his mind, like the later fool of New Testament

parable, to disregard God in his daily living. The most sceptical of the books of the Old Testament presupposes God's existence. The religious experience of these men and women must impress us all by its vitality. We must not, however, jump to the conclusion that the mass of the nation trod those spiritual heights. We know that it was not so. We know how the prophets were always trying to prevent the popular religion from degenerating, and inveighed against the corruption which crept in from outside. But the great religious leaders of the nation, and many an unknown Hebrew saint, had a most vivid sense of God, and in these writings have transcribed for us an experience of God which positively tingles with life. It is because this experience is so living and so varied, covering every mood of joy and sorrow, penitence and perplexity, that the world has gone to this literature for spiritual help. The Bible "finds me," said Coleridge. It will continue to "find" men, so long as the human soul is "athirst for God."

Let us give full weight to this religious experience of the Old Testament writers. It was no flash in the pan; it was a continuous growth covering many centuries. It deepened and broadened as time went on. And it was

charged with such vitality that it has been able to reproduce itself all down the ages till to-day. Our own religious experience falls into the same moulds as those of these Hebrews. We have entered into their spiritual heritage and find it inexhaustible. We shall have to discuss the problem of how we are to explain this remarkable fact. Is a naturalistic explanation possible, or are we driven to accept some theory of revelation? Is it enough to say that the Hebrew had a genius for religion, as the Greek had a genius for sculpture; or was there in actual fact a special contact of the Living God upon the hearts and minds of the writers? Problems of that kind are vital to our enquiry, and we shall be intimately concerned with them. All that is now urged in this first lecture is that religious experience shall be given a fair hearing.

Perhaps the cause of religious experience requires to-day no advocacy. Certainly the position is now very different from what it was a century and a half ago, when there was still in critical circles a tendency to ascribe religion to the machinations of an interested priesthood; or from what it was sixty or seventy years ago, when physical science in the full flush of its progress advanced the claim

that matter was the ultimate reality. Since that time three things have happened. In the first place the science of modern psychology has come into being, with its demonstration that mind cannot be treated as a by-product of physical and chemical forces, and that, if you wish to interpret the life of any organism, and more particularly the life of a higher organism such as man, you must take account of its strivings, its reaching out after the fulfilment of its own interests, must, in a word, recognize in it the presence of a spiritual factor. In the second place the study of Comparative Religion has grown to maturity, and reveals the universal presence among men of the religious interest. Religion cannot be brushed aside as the invention of a scheming priesthood ; it belongs to the basal constitution of mankind. Psychology, stimulated by the achievements of Comparative Religion, has of late years made religious experience one of its chief objects of investigation. Books dealing with the psychology of religion pour from the press, many of them of inferior value, but showing the immense interest which exists in the subject. Thirdly, the general temper of physical science has changed. It is not that science has altered its ideal. It still aims at interpreting reality

in terms of molecular physics ; but the best minds among its investigators have realized that, even if that ideal were reached, it would only be a partial and one-sided account of reality which they could offer. Explanation in terms of mechanical categories does not take us very far when we seek to understand ourselves, or the rich world in which we live. In such an explanation all judgments of worth or value are excluded, but it is just these judgments which give life its meaning. The True, the Good, the Beautiful ; prayer, remorse, aspiration ; the fifty-first psalm, or the prophet's vision of the coming kingdom of peace and righteousness—what have these to do with the test-tube or the laboratory ?

But though psychologists to-day are greatly interested in the psychology of religion, and have made religious experience in all its varied ranges the subject of careful analysis, we need to remind ourselves that to analyse an experience is not necessarily to explain it. The deeper question still remains and calls for an answer, Why is there any religious experience at all ? Why did the Hebrew prophets, for example, possess such a vivid sense of God ? Psychology is here in the same case as the physical sciences. It is not concerned with problems of ultimate

origin. But if we wish to understand religious experience, we must pass beyond psychology to philosophy and theology. The vital point to be decided is this. Is the experience of God, which is recorded in the Old Testament, a creation of pious human fancy, or is there something really objective which corresponds to it? In a word, is the Living God through His Spirit at work upon the human soul, or do we only imagine that He is?

We ought constantly to keep in mind this metaphysical or theological question, because the psychological analysis of religious experience may easily create the belief, or at any rate the suspicion, that what has been proved capable of analysis has been thereby analysed away to nothing. Take up a modern book of psychology or religious experience. You will find that its method is rightly genetic. It will try to show how the experience has arisen. It will reduce it to its component elements. It will find analogies for the experience in more elementary forms of religious life. It will probably call in the sub-conscious life of mind, in turn seeing in that a reflection of the instincts and tendencies which governed man in his infancy and were his heritage from an animal ancestry. In the mind of an untrained reader

the impression may arise, that developed religious experience is nothing more than a blend of fancy and superstition which critical reflection has entirely discredited. But the value or importance of a thing is not destroyed because you have shown how it has come to be.

The matter at issue turns upon the following consideration, which should be emphasized, because it so vitally concerns the Old Testament. When we are dealing with a process of development, what principle of interpretation are we to adopt? Are we to say that the lower explains the higher which has grown out of it, or that the higher explains the lower? Does the acorn explain the oak, or the oak the acorn? Surely the higher explains the lower. It is in the higher that we see the meaning of the process, the end towards which it is moving. So that, if we wish to interpret or discover the significance of a development, we must view it in the light of the end reached by it, and in the light of the continuous advance to the end. This planet, we are told, was once a ball of gas without life upon it. In the course of its history life, mind, morality have emerged. How are we to account for these? Supposing that we could explain the ball of gas in terms of molecular physics alone, is it not obvious

that the categories of molecular physics are inadequate to explain mind and morality? These need for their explanation new and higher categories. Hence, instead of saying that, because once there was only a ball of gas, therefore all the later stages of the planet's history are to be explained by the principles which it is thought explain the gaseous condition, we ought to affirm that the earth never was a *mere* ball of gas. It was gas pregnant with the potentiality of the whole spiritual evolution which has subsequently taken place. Mind and morality were somehow present all the time. If spiritual categories are required to explain the end of the process, they are also required to explain every stage of it.

In a development, then, we must keep our eyes fixed upon the increasing series of results which emerge as the development proceeds. The significant thing is the growing richness of the process, the unfolding of what was hidden in the germ. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." But the corn was all the while in the blade; or rather, the blade was always prophetic of the corn, and its prophecy received fulfilment through that Power behind the blade which creatively enriched its life and shaped its growth to the production of

fruit. What arrests our attention, as we study the Old Testament, is not only the vividness of the religious experience of its writers, but the progressive character of their teaching about God. It is this advance which needs explaining, and the loftiness of the conception of God finally reached. Because this grew out of something lower, it does not thereby lose its value. Origin and worth are independent of each other. There are, in a word, two distinct enquiries. One is historical ; how did a thing come to be ? The other is philosophical ; why is the thing there at all, and what grounds for its existence are there in the nature of ultimate reality ?

One other general consideration should here be taken into account. When we speak of something as being “ real ” we usually mean that it can be seen or touched or tasted. It belongs to the real world of material objects, and its existence can be tested and demonstrated in various ways. But many other existences are real which do not belong to the world of matter. My self, my mind and will, are real ; and my spiritual experiences are real. When Hezekiah wrote in the psalm which he composed after he had recovered from his sickness : “ O Lord, by these things

men live, and wholly therein is the life of my spirit,"¹ he was recording a series of very real experiences which had come to him, experiences of penitence and trust, of sorrow and gladness. He could not doubt their reality, and the most pronounced sceptic cannot deny that he had these experiences. The question is, What lay behind them? The starting point for all of us must be reality as given. There is an objective reality all around us. From the first moment of our existence we are in contact with it. It plays upon us, and reveals to us different sides of itself. This reality is something very complex, and affects us in different ways. It gives us our sensations of colour and warmth; it shows us beauty. Are we to say that there is nothing in it, which can affect us in the ways which we call moral and religious? Why should not the experience of peace and pardon which comes to the Christian be the result of a definite contact of God upon his soul? If God can speak through the beauty of nature, why should He not speak through conscience or the act of adoration? Why rule out the mystic's sense of communion with God as an illusion? The prism breaks up the sunlight into its component colours. So God's

¹ Isaiah xxxviii. 16.

truth comes to us through the prism of His universe, rays of that truth pouring in upon us from different angles and through different channels, some material, some spiritual ; but all testifying to a reality from which they emanate. There is, then, no valid ground for saying that spiritual experiences are any less real than our experiences of autumn colour, or the voice of a friend.

The Old Testament, then, is a text-book of religious experience. Its writers put down what they believed they had found out about God, and in what ways God was influencing their own lives and the course of the nation's history. Now while this fact that they are transcribing an experience gives an extraordinary vitality and freshness to their writings, it creates a difficulty for the theologian ; because it means that there is no systematic theology in the Old Testament. There is no attempt made to unfold in orderly manner the doctrine of God. Many of these Scriptures may be called occasional writings. Their authors wrote as their spiritual experience moved them, though of course in the historical books there is the deliberate purpose of writing a continuous, national history. Theology is the science of God. It seeks to give a reasoned, systematic account

of God, of His essential Being, attributes, method of government, purpose, and the like. The Biblical theologian has to form his theology out of the material which he finds in the Bible. He has to create his Biblical theology and then relate that to his general theology. When he sets about his task, he quickly discovers that the Hebrew writers were not of a speculative cast of mind. This does not mean that there are no speculative books in the Old Testament, nor that in the later literature, after the crash of the exile had driven men in upon themselves to reflect, doubts and questionings did not arise upon the nature of God's government, and the possibility of reconciling His care for Israel with the suffering and misfortune which had overtaken the nation. But the Hebrew never set out to prove that God existed, or to analyse His Being in any systematic manner. He started with the existence of God as an axiom or postulate, and then used his conception of God as a flashlight to illumine human life and its problems. The literature is the record of an experience. The experience was already there, and was the experience of the Living God. Consequently it is only here and there in the Old Testament that we find used what may broadly be called the inductive method of

argument. We find it in such a Psalm as xciv. with its question: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear; or he that made the eye, shall he not see?" but in Psalm viii. with its appeal to the wonders of the starry sky, the assumption is already present that God had made the heavens, that they were the work of His fingers.

It is important to grasp this characteristic of the Old Testament, because it serves only to bring into greater relief the central problem which confronts us. How is it that this wonderful experience of God ever came to be? The Hebrew writers had their own explanation, which is summed up in the one word, Revelation.

They were convinced that God was revealing Himself to them. This idea of revelation will be examined in the next lecture. What concerns us now is merely to emphasize this central fact, that in the Old Testament we have the record of an experience of God, which came to a particular nation and its religious leaders; an experience which continued through many centuries and grew in depth and meaning.

The root out of which it sprang was the common ethnic, or natural, religion, shared by the Hebrews with other Semites, of which many traces remain in the literature. Upon this

stock it was grafted, and it developed in amazing fashion. The problem which has to be explained is why it grew into an ethical monotheism, purified of crudities and superstitions, and breathing a lofty spirituality.

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves that this religious experience can be adequately appreciated by us, only if we fulfil the necessary spiritual conditions. "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end." There must be the desire to learn. "The opening of thy words giveth light ; it giveth understanding unto the simple." We must put ourselves like children to school with the Bible. "Order my footsteps in thy word ; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." It is the pure in heart who see God, and those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness." "Study to be quiet," says the Apostle. The deeper messages of prophet and psalmist can be understood only in the pauses of our rushing life, when the voices of the world are hushed, when the soul is alone with God, and God's truth has time to sink into the recesses of our being. It was in these ways and under this self-discipline that the Hebrew writers reached their experience ; and what was open to them is open to us. God does not

change. In a changing world two things remain the same, the Living God, and the human nature which He has made with its needs. Everywhere and always man is crying out for God, when he listens to the voices of his deeper self; and his cry goes up to no unresponsive Heaven, but to the Father of human spirits, whose nature it is to reveal Himself to His children.

CHAPTER II

THE IDEA OF REVELATION

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son. HEBREWS i. 1, 2.

THE subject of this and of the succeeding lecture is the Idea of Revelation. The Hebrew writers claimed that God was revealing Himself to their nation, and that their religious experience was born of this divine self-disclosure. Can their claim be sustained? Let us examine this idea of revelation.

It is a striking fact that almost all the sacred books of the world profess to be based on a revelation. In India the Vedas are called "revelation" (S'ruti) as distinguished from "tradition" (Smriti). In Persia the Avesta are believed to have been communicated to Zoroaster by the god Ahura himself. Mohammedans say that the Koran is a copy of a heavenly book, the contents of which were made known to the prophet by an angel. And if we go back to primitive religion, where there are no sacred books, or investigate the religion of uncivilized peoples to-day, we everywhere

find ourselves confronted with this belief in revelation. The priest, the witch-doctor, the medicine-man hold their position of authority in the tribe because it is believed that they are either possessed by a spirit, or are in some way in touch with the invisible world, whose secrets they are empowered to reveal. The idea of revelation is almost universal. Why is this? What conclusions can we draw from the fact? The theist will draw a different conclusion from the sceptic, but both will agree on this point, that the widespread belief in revelation witnesses to a deeply felt need in man. Man needs God, has always needed God. Religion, whatever form it takes, is an indication that human nature is not self-sufficing, but seeks to come into some living contact with superior powers, that it may satisfy its needs, needs which in the first instance are mainly practical.

Try to picture primitive man, surrounded by a mysterious universe which wakes his wonder and curiosity. He knows nothing about natural forces ; he is awed by the thunder and lightning and eclipse. He wonders what the sun is which warms him and drives away the darkness, what death is, what dreams are in which his dead come back to visit him. It is not surprising that he constructs a religion. For he has to

satisfy the feelings of awe and reverence which awake in his breast ; and—a matter of greater importance—in his hard struggle with Nature he longs to win over to his own side whatever powers there may be which lie hidden behind the face of things. Thus he fashions his god, and then seeks to keep him in a good temper with sacrifices ; or, knowing that the hidden god is stronger than himself, tries by curious rites to lay hold on that god's strength and draw it down into his own life, so that he may have victory over his enemies, or escape disease, or acquire magical powers over Nature. His practical needs wake to life his slumbering instinct for religion. He searches for God, and satisfies himself that God answers his search and in manifold ways reveals Himself.

Now the sceptic will argue that, because the idea of revelation is virtually universal, and because in many cases the supposed revelation is so fantastic, so mixed up with superstitions which enlightened reason must reject, we have nothing here but the product of human fancy, “the cobwebs men have spun.” And if we point to the wonder of the thought of God contained in the Old Testament he will retort as follows : “It is not surprising that, among all the varieties of national temperament which

have developed in the long course of evolution, one race should have reached the idea of the unity of God, and should have attributed to Him moral qualities. The Semites had an instinct for monotheism. The Hebrews were a branch of the Semites. They inherited their monotheistic instinct from their ancestral past and developed it. But equally with the religion of primitive man it remains a human fabrication. It rests upon an imagined revelation." We must be fair to the naturalistic contention. Let us frankly admit that much in all religions which claims to be based on a revelation is not really so based. Much is due to human construction. Man casts his own image upon the clouds and calls it God. We have to make this admission in the case of the Old Testament. A century or less ago the Bible was regarded as standing apart from all other religious books, and the life of the Hebrew people was treated in isolation, and was not brought into contact with the movements of general history. Strange happenings are recorded in the Old Testament, tales of marvel which would have been regarded as incredible had they been told of any other nation. But no question was raised about them, because they occurred among a people whose whole life and history were unique.

Here was a special sphere where God was acting in a special manner. In the last half century the science of Comparative Religion has developed. Other faiths all over the world have been investigated, and the result has been the discovery in the Old Testament of beliefs and practices which are common to other religions. For instance, the practice of sacrifice is well-nigh universal ; as is the habit of worship under trees regarded as sacred, or the setting up of stone pillars. The Hebrews had a religion which they shared with the other Semites, before they became, as we believe, subject to a special process of divine education. And that ethnic religion had its roots in a dim and distant past. Many traces are found in the Old Testament of these more primitive beliefs and practices, embedded there like fossils in the rock, witnessing to man's age-long search for God. We are compelled to concede to naturalistic criticism the admission, that there is in the Old Testament an element which cannot be regarded as specifically revealed. But we must note two points. First, as the Hebrew faith developed these more primitive elements drop out of sight, if not in the popular observances of religion, at any rate in the great religious teachers of the nation. The purity

of the prophetic conception of God is amazing. Secondly, all the more marked becomes the contrast between the lowly origin of Hebrew religion and its final maturity. There is an ethnic background, a basis of belief and ritual which we are compelled to regard as not revealed, but there stands out against it in glowing colours a view of God's character and purposes entirely unknown to any other race. Naturalistic criticism has served only to bring into greater prominence the moral and spiritual uniqueness of the Hebrew conception of God. The problem is to explain how this arose.

Can it be explained by the hypothesis of a special capacity for religion in the Semites? Behind this capacity the theist places God, whose ordering of the world provided that at the necessary time and place the Hebrew race should arise, and be guided in their development by His Spirit. Such a view allows for a continuous divine action upon this people. It is not easy to say what is meant by a special activity of God. However the result was achieved, the initiative all through belongs to God, as the Old Testament writers themselves saw. They unhesitatingly use the word "revelation" to explain their religious experience. They do not regard themselves as

rewarded with a special divine self-disclosure because they had been particularly active in their search for God ; nor are they conscious of possessing any natural superiority of religious insight. They are simply aware of the graciousness of God in making known to them His truth. Everywhere in the Old Testament God is pictured as the Giver and man as the receiver.

N.B.

Now the problem whether there has been in fact a revelation of God made to humanity through the medium of the Hebrew nation depends on a prior problem, whether a revelation from God is possible ; and, if it is possible, whether it is likely to have occurred. Here everything turns upon our conception of God.

We need not discuss at any length the three main forms of belief which are opposed to Theism, and go by the names of Pantheism, Materialism and Agnosticism. But a brief reference may be made to each, and thus the ground will be cleared for reaching a true conception of God.

(a) Pantheism in its strict etymological meaning implies the identity of God with the universe. God is all and all is God. There is one great Existence or Life which is manifested in phenomena. All is divine. The cancer and

the lily are equally God. Nero and Christ are both expressions of the one ultimate reality.¹ Surely that is an impossible creed. It makes havoc of moral distinctions. Pantheism suffers shipwreck over the problem of moral evil. We instinctively revolt against any creed which finds God as much in vice as in virtue, in ugliness as much as in beauty.

There is a religious value of an emotional kind in Pantheism. It fosters what may be called the cosmic sense, the sense of the wholeness of existence, the mystery of this one, great unfolding life. It helps us to see the infinite in things, and promotes the feelings of awe and wonder. Among our English poets Wordsworth had most developed this consciousness of the unity of Nature, man, and God, to which he gave classic expression in the lines on "Tintern Abbey." But Wordsworth was not a pantheist. He was a stern moralist, who

¹ But such a writer as J. A. Picton would deny that you can call the lily God. "If Pantheism affirms God to be All in All, it does not follow that Pantheism must hold a man, or a tree, or a tiger to be God." That is, no part of the whole taken by itself can be regarded as God; it is God only if it is viewed as a part of the whole. Further, Mr. Picton refuses to equate God and the universe. The final Unity "is not merely the aggregate of all the finite objects which we observe or infer, but is a living whole expressing itself in infinite variety." The ultimate ground of existence has, as it were, reserves of power, and its nature is never adequately expressed by the universe as it is at any moment. (The quotations are from Dr. Garvie's article "Pantheism" in *Hastings' Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*.)

never blurred the lines between right and wrong. And he gave a clear answer to the question, to which no pantheist can give a clear answer—Is there Personality in God? Wordsworth unhesitatingly said “Yes.” If you press a pantheist, he will be ultimately driven to speak of God as “It” not “He.” The pantheist is so enamoured of the vision of the whole, of the totality of things, that he substitutes the distinction of part and whole for the distinction of right and wrong. Earth’s discords make a harmony in the scheme of final being. Sin is a local eddy in the smooth-flowing stream of being. Not along that path shall we reach a satisfactory conception of God.

(b) Materialism asserts that matter is the ultimate reality. The universe is one vast machine. In the dateless past there was nothing but the dance of atoms or electrons and out of that has come the whole development of the universe. It is true that in the course of that development a very strange thing happened. Consciousness appeared. There arrived upon the scene a being called man, who possessed a mind with which he began to read the secrets of the universe, discovered the atom and the electron, and laid bare the

laws of their evolution. He possessed too a will, and in virtue of that will has in all ages for the most part refused to believe that he himself is a machine, whatever the universe may be. Nor can he reasonably think of his own mind as matter, or a product of matter. It cannot be weighed or measured. It does not occupy space, as all matter does. It seems to belong to an altogether different order of being. Materialism breaks down when confronted with the fact of mind. "The brain secretes thought, as the liver secretes bile" is a famous dictum of materialism. But it has no meaning. The secretion of a gland belongs to the order of material things. The gland and its secretion are both matter. But here you have a material thing, brain, secreting something invisible, intangible, which does not belong to the world of matter at all. Materialism to-day is a dying creed. And that it has failed to commend itself to the human race at large is proved by the universal presence of religion among men; for religion, even in its crudest form, witnesses to the belief in the existence of spiritual powers in and behind the visible scene.

(c) There remains Agnosticism, the creed which does not deny the existence of God, as

Atheism does, but says that we cannot know anything about God. Our minds are so constructed that we can only know phenomena ; we cannot know anything about ultimate reality. A strict Agnostic therefore cannot affirm even the existence of God. There may be a God, or there may not. Man, according to the Agnostic creed (or rather denial of creed) is surrounded by total darkness. He looks up to a blank heaven. He cries aloud like the prophets of Baal on Carmel, but there is "neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." A large number of Agnostics, Herbert Spencer the protagonist of modern agnosticism among them, are, however, not logical. They admit the existence of God, a Supreme Unknown Being, but say we can know nothing of His nature. But if the human mind can say that God exists, if it can so far establish relation with the Unknown Power, why cannot it go further? If you can send one message along the telegraph wire, why cannot you send more? Agnosticism will never satisfy the human race. Philosophically it is indefensible ; and for practical purposes it is a desolating theory, which is in sharp opposition to man's age-long search for God, his demand to know, his instinctive feeling that the last votive offering

of religion cannot be an altar to an "Unknown God."

There is, however, a very real sense in which we must all be agnostics. How little we really know ! We take up some small text-book of theology, or some popular religious manual which deals with Christian theology, and are dumbfounded at the glib fashion in which all the great mysteries of being are made clear. The writer seems to know all about Heaven and Hell and the intermediate state, all about God in His Threefold Nature, all about body, soul and spirit, and God's governance of the world. We read that ; and then we take up a modern book on astronomy and are told of stars, whose light travelling at 187,000 miles a second takes 32,000 years to reach the earth ; or of a nebula in Orion which occupies the space which millions of our suns would occupy if you expanded them till they were of the same density as the nebula. The imagination is paralyzed ; our brains reel at the immensities of the stellar universe ; and of God we can only say with Job, " Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways ; and how small a whisper do we hear of him ! but the thunder of his power who can understand ? "

Yet agnosticism has not the last word. We

may liken man faced with the mysteries of the universe to a traveller with a lantern on a dark night. There is the ¹inner circle of brilliance illuminating his path, and showing him where to tread. ²Beyond him is a wavering circle of lesser illumination which moves as the lantern swings; ³outside that is impenetrable gloom. We have our inner circle of light. We have our fixed points of what we believe to be truth. We have enough illumination by which to live. And the Christian believes that his brightest light has come to him through revelation.

Now of course it does not follow logically that because men, not only Christians but men of almost every creed, have believed that a revelation has been given them, their belief is true. Wishes are not necessarily a pledge of their own fulfilment. Yet, if this world serves a rational purpose and has a meaning, there is much weight in the argument that a deep-rooted instinct like religion must needs find some fulfilment. The profoundest feature of human nature is surely its religious instinct; and among all the things for which man searches is there anything more important for him to discover than God, the ultimate reality? It would seem therefore natural that, if there be a God who has made man with the instinct to

search for Him, He should reward that search by some disclosure of Himself. In other words, the ideas of God and revelation march hand in hand. It is surely God's nature to reveal himself. God, we believe is Spirit. Now spirit is one of those rather vague words, which we find it difficult to define. But spirit, as we know it in ourselves, has this characteristic, that it is creative. It expresses itself in action. It is purposeful. We build bridges, and paint pictures and write poems, because we want to express ourselves. A person is always revealing himself in his contacts with his material surroundings and with his fellow-men. And so we think of the great Spirit whom we call God as eternally expressing or revealing Himself in His universe. What we call Creation is God making a self-disclosure. Matter (whatever it may ultimately be) is the instrument through which spirit expresses its purposes.

If you study the story of this earth, as science has sketched it for us, you find a remarkable sequence in the self-disclosure of God. You have a revelation which is manifested in ascending degrees. Philosophy has taken hold of this thought, and makes much use of the idea of degrees of reality. First, you have a long evolution of the inorganic, during which through

millions of years the earth cooled down from a gaseous state to a more solid state. Then, when its crust was ready for life, life appeared in very lowly form, probably on the margins of the warm oceans. This life may have been introduced from without by a special creative act of God. More probably it arose out of conditions of the inorganic, which we cannot to-day reproduce. Thus there would be continuity in the divine action ; one, unbroken process of divine creative activity. These primitive germs of life were endowed with marvellous powers. Out of them, through contact with a changing environment, have arisen through immense epochs of time, all the varied forms of animal and vegetable life which populate the globe. Then came man, not (so all the evidence leads us to believe) specially created at a stroke, but gradually developing out of some stock common with the apes. Man is not descended from the apes ; both apes and man have branched off from a common stock in different directions. The evidence seems to show that the human race made more than one attempt to develop. Along certain lines it failed. There were races of men, in many ways very different from our own, who lived on the earth for considerable periods and then perished.

They never developed to any high level. They were perhaps more akin to the beasts than to man as we know him to-day. But one race of men, *homo sapiens* as science calls him, the race to which we belong, made good his footing in this globe and has become the dominant species.

And what are his characteristics? Intellectually he stands far above the rest of the animal creation. But his intellect is not his true hall-mark. That is to be seen in his moral and spiritual capacity. In man as a spiritual being we shall discover the clearest expression of the nature of God.

In this long evolutionary process, which is God's revelation of Himself, the revelation grows richer as the evolution proceeds. That is the point on which we must fix our attention. There is an increasing self-disclosure of God. Thus, while the inorganic tells you something about God, life tells you more ; and the higher you go in the scale of life the clearer is the revelation ; till in man it reaches its climax. From Nature we should not learn that God cared for morality ; but we do learn that from man. Nature shows us very little which would enable us to say that God was Love ; but when you reach human fellowship and affection, and

pity and tenderness, you have some ground for saying that there is that in God which really corresponds to these qualities in man. We cannot read the story of evolution without seeing in it the story of a plan or purpose. We cannot but draw the conclusion that God had a purpose in creation, and that He meant to call into being a society of moral personalities, who should live by the law of love and the law of duty, and so reflect in their individual and corporate life the principles and energies of His own nature. In a word, personality is the highest thing we know, and it is that to the production of which all the evolution has tended. Thus we see in personality the key to the meaning of the whole process. And since you cannot get something out of nothing we argue that there must be in God something really akin to the personality which we know in ourselves. We believe God is most clearly revealing Himself in human personality ; and that if we want to know what God is like we must look at the human heart—not at its sin, but at its ideals, its spiritual vision, its love, its capacity for fellowship. God is Power and Majesty and Transcendence, and many other things quite beyond our ken. But we do not put our main emphasis on those attributes ;

but rather on the qualities of Holiness, and Pity and Love and Tenderness. We best find God where the great unknown prophet of the exile, whom we call Second Isaiah found Him. "For thus said the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." ¹

May we not carry this argument about the probability of a revelation one stage further? What, let us ask, are some of the large reasons for believing that we have in Jesus Christ the supreme revelation of God? Let us think of only two, both germane to the general line of thought in this lecture.

(a) First, if the production of personality is (so far as we can read it) the purpose of the long evolutionary process, and if we grant the existence of a God who is in control of the evolution, is there anything unreasonable in supposing that at a given point in the process the Perfect Person should appear, to set the standard for the development of personality? Might not God very naturally crown His growing self-disclosure by a revelation of Himself in a

¹ lvii. 15.

human personality? Strauss and his rationalizing contemporaries a century ago used to make much of the argument that, in an evolutionary process which was directed to the making of men, you would expect the perfect humanity to appear at the end of the process, and not at some mid-way point in it. Hence they rejected the traditional view of Christ. But God cannot be tied down to the measure of evolution. Evolution does not go on apart from God. It is God at work; and, as we have seen, His revelation of Himself increases in richness as the development proceeds. If He is not exhausted by the process, if He has reserves of power, if He is free Spirit, why cannot He so direct the process that at a certain point the Perfect Person appears? Why cannot He, who controls the process, Himself enter into it under the form of a perfect human personality?

May we not then reasonably make our own the words which I have selected as a text: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son?" We must not limit the varied utterance of God to the revelation recorded in the Old Testament. Ever

since man appeared on earth, and reached a stage at which morality and religion had any meaning for him, God has been speaking to him ; in the storm and sunshine, in the growth of the crops, in the beauties of Nature, in the voice of conscience, in the impulse which led him to offer sacrifices, in the strange spiritual movements of his soul. All the while God has been gradually revealing Himself. And then, we believe, He intensified His revelation through the channels of a special nation ; and finally crowned it in the coming of Jesus Christ.

(b) Our second reason for believing that God "hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son," is the fact of human need. Religion, as we have seen, arose originally because man had to satisfy certain needs within himself. At first the needs may have been comparatively simple and of a directly practical kind ; but, as man developed, the needs became more complex, and took on a more spiritual colour. What are the main needs of man which religion seeks to satisfy ? With all our differences of race and upbringing and culture we are in fundamental constitution alike. There are certain deep, abiding needs of the human soul, which remain unchanged

through all the centuries. May we not say that they are threefold ?

1. Man desires to be sure of God. He wants to know what God is like ; whether He can be trusted, or is a capricious tyrant ; whether He cares for man or is indifferent to human welfare. All religion is directed to satisfying that great need.

2. Man is confronted by the mystery of death. What is death ? What lies beyond it ? Does anything lie beyond it ? That is a problem which looms large in primitive religion, and indeed in all religions. Man has always been searching for an answer. This is another great need of the human spirit.

3. There is a need, not perhaps so prominent in the earlier stages of man's evolution, but growing increasingly prominent as the moral element in humanity developed, the need for some revelation which will deal with all that strange, spiritual uneasiness which gathers round the fact of sin. Explain it how you will, here are we with consciences which " make cowards of us all," with memories of wrong things done which haunt us, with the worm of remorse gnawing at our heart, with thoughts of judgment to come, with that incessant fight going on within as between good and evil. We look into ourselves and we see profound abysses, spiritual depths which no plumbline can fathom, and we cry out to God for some revelation which can quiet all this turmoil, and set us at peace with ourselves and Him.

Now has Jesus Christ met these abiding needs of humanity, or has He not ?

1. First, the need for being sure of God. He revealed Him as unchanging Love, as caring for the very sparrows, much more for the men and women made in His own image. His whole picture of God is of One who can be utterly trusted.

2. Second, death and its darkness. He says it is not death, but life ; it is not dark, but light. And from beyond

the stream of death He calls, saying: "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

3. And thirdly, the spiritual unrest of the human heart. Did Jesus meet that need? Did He not tell of divine forgiveness, of divine power to help us in our struggle with temptation? Did he not on the Cross show divine love wrestling with sin and winning the victory? What more could God have done? Could the revelation have been richer or more satisfying?

Note, in conclusion, that you cannot treat the Old Testament in isolation from the New Testament, or the New in isolation from the Old. The one looks forward to the other and finds its fulfilment in it. Hence in studying the idea of revelation in the Old Testament we have to take into account what we hold to be the revelation in Jesus Christ. If we find good grounds for believing that in Jesus Christ God was revealing Himself, and if there is spiritual continuity between Hebrew religion and His coming and teaching, then we are helped in our study of revelation in the Old Testament by reflecting upon the significance of Jesus Christ. We need in studying the Old Testament always to keep in mind that to which it led, and in which it issued; remembering that, as we have seen, in a process it is the end which explains the beginning and not the beginning which explains the end. Progressive

revelation is the thought which we shall find full of significance ; the light growing brighter ; the first streak of dawn the herald of an increasing brilliance ; the first dim idea of God the prophecy of an increasing knowledge of Him. So the great Father trains His children, suiting His revelation to their capacity to understand.

CHAPTER III

THE IDEA OF REVELATION (*continued*)

I have declared, and I have saved, and I have shewed. ISAIAH
xliii. 12.

CONTINUING in this chapter our study of the idea of revelation, let us first examine the antithesis between Natural and Revealed Religion. This antithesis takes us back to the eighteenth century, when the Deistic controversy was raging in England. You cannot sum up in a paragraph the mind of a century; but are we wrong in saying that it was a century which, at any rate for the greater part of it, had little or no feeling for history? It lacked just those ideas which are so characteristic of our own thought to-day, the ideas of growth, continuity, development. It was the age of reason. Reason was proud of its powers, confident that it could solve the deepest problems. But what the men of that century meant by reason was something rather shallow. It was logical reason which loved demonstration and abstract generalization. It was understanding rather than the deeper reason which includes

the movement of the whole personality. The stream flowed brightly and quickly and chattered over the pebbles, but it was shallow, and the "murmurs and scents of the infinite sea" never reached it.

Now the Deistic controversy was thoroughly characteristic of the spirit of the period. The fundamental problem of this dispute was to discover what were the valid, rational grounds for believing in Christianity. The urgency of this problem had been growing for some time for the following reasons. First, when the Protestant churches broke away from the authority of Rome they substituted for that authority the authority of the Bible. But then there was no agreement as to the interpretation of the Bible; and since the right of private judgment was allowed by the Protestants there was no tribunal which could decide between rival interpretations. And the authority of the Bible was being called in question by free-thinkers, and owing to the rise of the higher criticism. Secondly, knowledge of the globe was increasing and men were beginning to widen their idea of religion, because they were learning how very varied were religious beliefs in different parts of the world. Could the claim of Christianity to be the one

supreme revelation from God be sustained? There were vast populations in distant regions of the earth, living happy and useful lives, who had never heard of Christianity. Were they, as the orthodox teaching seemed to suggest, condemned to eternal ruin? And could we be sure that this small planet, the earth, had actually been the scene of such a tremendous drama as the Christian churches affirmed?

Out of that general situation arose the problem of the distinction of natural and revealed religion. Was there not a natural religion consisting of truths about God reached by the unaided use of human reason? In addition was there not a revealed religion which came in to supplement natural religion?

We need not go through the history of this controversy. Apart from Bishop Butler's *Analogy* which completely refuted the Deists, the greatest book produced in the dispute was Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730). Tindal argues that there is a religion of nature; and that there is a revealed religion; but the latter is simply a duplicate of the former. The purpose of Christianity was to restore and republish natural religion. The religion of nature consisted of truths imprinted in our common humanity and accessible to all.

Many of the so-called truths of revealed religion were obviously not of this universal character ; and so Tindal rejects them. He will admit revelation only so far as its contents agree with natural religion.

The defenders of Christianity met this attack in two ways. Some urged that human reason was not the powerful instrument which the Deist said it was ; that man was a “ fallen ” creature, that his reason was tainted ; and hence there was need of a revelation to make good the defects in the scheme constructed by reason. Others questioned Tindal’s assumption that there was a religion of nature consisting of truths printed in our humanity and accessible by all. Knowledge of other races was, as we have seen, growing ; and it became increasingly clear that there was no universal acceptance of a common body of religious truths. Religions varied enormously ; and if you took what was common to all religions you would reach a very meagre body of truths. The upholders of natural religion thought that by the use of reason you could establish such truths as that of the Wisdom, Benevolence, Goodness of God ; and many would have added human immortality and judgment to come.

Gradually the controversy died down, because

men saw how barren it was. It pre-supposed a kind of abstract, static human nature, the same in all men ; and a law of nature fixed and immutable. The whole discussion, as we see to-day, was up in the air and divorced from the concrete facts of history and historical development.

Moreover a further difficulty showed itself. The contrast between natural and revealed religion was a contrast between a body of beliefs on the one hand, common to all religions ; and certain special and unique truths to be found in Christianity. But were these Christian truths so unique ? As men learned more about the religions of the world they found that other religions spoke of an Incarnation, of a Virgin Birth, of a Redeemer dying and coming to life again. It quickly became apparent how artificial was the supposed distinction between natural and revealed religion. And we to-day, with our knowledge of comparative religion and our evolutionary outlook breathe an atmosphere entirely different from that of the eighteenth century, so that the old controversy has lost much of its interest for us.

And yet the problem remains, Is there no value in the distinction between natural and revealed religion ?

(a) Now a little reflection makes it clear

that we cannot divide religious truths into two separate compartments, putting into the one compartment all those truths about God which we reach by the unaided use of our reason, and into the other the truths given by revelation. We cannot do this, because there are no truths which we discover by our unaided reason. Could man discover anything unless God were willing to make the truth known? ¹ Prometheus in the old legend stole the sacred fire from heaven. But can man filch from God truth without God's consent? Yet that is what the theory of natural religion implies. It implies that man, without any co-operation of God can reach certain truths about God. But you cannot really know a human being intimately unless he reveals himself to you. He must be willing that you should understand him and must open his soul to you. Can we know anything at all about God, the Great Spirit "in whom we live and move and have our being," unless God is all the while teaching us? Therefore the truths of so-called natural religion are really revealed truths in so far as they are truths at all.

(b) But it is also clear that we cannot regard

¹ cp. *Problems in the Relations of God and Man*, ch. 1 and 2. By Prof. C. C. J. Webb.

all the beliefs of primitive, or indeed of advanced religion, as revealed. We think of all the superstitions connected with religion, of the grossness of popular Hindu conceptions of deity, of the utterly unethical character of many of the ideas about God which have obtained in the past and still obtain to-day; and we feel that these were not revealed. What then are we to say? We can only point to the fact that there has been in the evolution of religion a line of progress; there has been advance in the conception of God and His character; and along that line we may truly say that God has been revealing Himself. The advance is most clearly shown in these two ways. First, there has been increasing emphasis upon the moral content of religion. Character has become more important than ritual, right conduct from the right motive more important than correctness of ceremonial observance. This advance we owe in the main to the Hebrew prophets, who always insisted that God was a Being of moral character, who required morality in His worshippers. Secondly there has been a growing perception that the best index to the character of God is not Nature, the outward visible scene, but man. Nature reveals something of God, especially the beauty

of Nature ; but man with his love, pity, sympathy, man aspiring to reach his ideal, man as a spiritual being, gives us the best clue to the Being of God.

As we survey the story of our planet as a whole and try to discover the significance of the vast process of evolution which has been going on through all these millions of years, we surely must reach the conclusion that, if there is any meaning at all in the evolution, it is a spiritual meaning. And man is called by God to co-operate in the carrying out of this divine purpose. Now man is not a machine but a free agent ; and because he possesses at any rate a measure of freedom he can make mistakes and hinder the working out of the divine purpose. In a scheme which has at its centre this thought of human co-operation with God there is room for the rise of superstition and false conceptions of God. Yet all the while, through struggle and opposition, the true conception of God slowly makes its way.

It is a mistake to think that evolution necessarily spells progress. In the world of Nature there are countless forms of life which have survived because they have adopted habits of life which are off the main line of advance. In fact two-thirds of living forms are parasites,

and a parasite is a degenerate organism. In the struggle for existence so keen is the competition, that organisms often are able to survive only because they have dropped out of the race. If that is so in nature, much more is it so with man, because man possesses freedom. Tribes and races become degenerate. Ancient Rome perished. Assyria, Babylon—where are they? Will England be in the van of advance a thousand years hence? If we take a broad survey of the religious life of mankind we can truly speak of an evolution of religion; but the movement has not been uniform. There have been retrogressions, fallings away from positions reached earlier. The stream has often turned back upon itself and has been split into minor currents, which have carved out their own channels in independence of the course of the main river.

But as we trace the line of progress, how the movement recorded in the Old and New Testaments stands out! It stands out, first, in virtue of the superiority of its view of God and of its ethical teaching. Secondly, it has controlled all subsequent advance. The religion whose story is told in the Bible is a conquering creed. The spread of Christianity proves it. In the long run, if man remains a

religious being (and we can hardly think that he will abandon religion) his religion will be Christianity. Already there are signs that the ancient faiths of India and the East are giving way through contact with Western civilization. And more ; in India, one of the most remarkable facts at this time is the rise of Hindu religious societies which frankly adopt Christian ethics and pay great reverence to the Person of Christ. Those who have first-hand acquaintance with the religious life of India speak of the immense difference which has come over educated Indian thought in the last two decades. Twenty years ago the name of Christ was hissed at public meetings. To-day it is respected, and many educated Hindus are frankly admitting that only Christ's ideals can give their people the true nationhood for which they are seeking. At the other end of the scale what are known as the "mass-movements" among the out-castes testify to the increasing attraction which Christianity exercises. It will no doubt be a long time before the whole East is Christianized ; but the point is that in the long run there are only two alternatives—Christianity, or an agnostic rationalism. And need the race be so long ? In matters spiritual there is no uniform time-rate. Hebrew prophecy came to

full fruitage in a century or two. The art of Greece blossomed rapidly. The pace at which the world is Christianized depends on our readiness to co-operate with the Spirit of God, who (so we must judge) has entered on one of His great creative periods. "Behold, I make all things new." That voice from the throne is sounding insistently to-day.

The distinction then between natural and revealed religion cannot be maintained in the old form. In a very real sense man's discovery is God's revelation. It were better to speak of degrees of revelation, to think of God as never having left Himself without witness, of a growing self-disclosure on God's part, culminating in the special self-disclosure recorded in the Bible.

In the remainder of this lecture let us consider the idea of Revelation in connection with the Being or Nature of God. Why has God revealed Himself at all? Is it not because it belongs to His very nature to do so? We are wrong if we think of revelation as an arbitrary act of God or as something which He just chose to do. Revelation is the expression of His essential Being. He is of such a character that He must reveal Himself. We cannot treat the will of God in abstraction from the nature of God.

His will is His nature in active operation, just as our volitional activities spring from and express our characters.

Let us take two of the large ideas connected with the Being of God which are presented to us in the Old Testament, Creation and Redemption.

(a) God is there brought before us as a Creator, as the Being to whom the universe owes its origin and upon whom it depends for its continuance. Now what do we mean by creation? The notion which comes most readily to our minds when creation is mentioned is "making something out of nothing." And there is immense value for religious thought in that idea, because it dispels the rival notion (so common in pagan thought) that matter is in its own right as eternal as God. The idea of creation is a protest against all forms of dualism which make something else a kind of rival to God. It helps to maintain the sovereignty of God and the absolute dependence of the universe upon Him. But "making out of nothing" is not the really important idea in creation and it conveys nothing positive to us; for, though we ourselves are creators, anything which we create in the physical realm is fashioned out of an already existing material. Self-expression or self-manifestation is surely

the meaning of creation. The universe is the manifestation of the character and purpose of God. God in creating goes out of Himself, reveals His nature, leaves His isolation.

But at once the question arises, was He ever isolated? Has He not always been creating; is not creation an eternal act? We have, of course, no means of finally determining this question. The traditional orthodox view is that from all eternity God loved the Son, and went out from Himself towards this Other, who was part of His eternal Being; and then at a certain moment of time created a universe, which up till then had not existed. But what moved Him then to begin to create? Was His glory incomplete without a universe? One can hardly think of there being any lack or deficiency in God. Philosophy certainly leans rather to the thought that God has always been creating, has never been without a universe to be the expression of His purposes. There is no proof that the universe suddenly came into being. It seems more reasonable to suppose that there has been an unending succession of universes and that we are living in one of these phases of evolution, a phase which certainly had its beginning and (so far as we can judge) will have its end, but behind

which lies an endless series of other phases. In other words it is God's nature to create, to reveal or manifest Himself. But we must be careful in the interests of a true theistic faith not to interpret this divine necessity to create as if it were a mechanical necessity imposed upon the Creator. Creation is the free expression of His will. Matter is the instrument He calls into being and uses. The ultimate source of power in the universe lies in the divine volition.

If, then, we think of creation as divine self-expression, and if it belongs to the very nature of God to express Himself, then we see that the idea of Revelation and of God go together. Revelation is nothing arbitrary. To reveal Himself is—if we may state it crudely—what we should expect God to do.

(b) Turn to the other large idea in the Old Testament, the idea of Redemption. The Old Testament describes the working out of what the Hebrews held to be a great redemptive purpose of God. The revelation of God in Nature had been supplemented by a far richer revelation of God in regard to man. If Nature spoke of His power and wisdom and majesty, the history of the Hebrew people spoke of the divine love and of a moral purpose of love towards

mankind. This purpose was concerned in the first instance with Israel, whom, for no merit of its own, God chose to be the recipients of a special revelation. But, as we shall see in later passages of this book, the prophets who had the deepest and widest vision of God's purpose for Israel saw that a spiritual revelation could not be confined to one people. It must be in intention world-wide. After all, God was the Creator of all men and the Ruler of all history. Men everywhere were made in the divine image, had the same fundamental moral constitution, the same needs and aspirations. Hence a revelation from God could not be limited in scope. It was the tragedy of the Jewish people that after the Exile they lost sight of this wider purpose of God and became narrow in outlook, fencing themselves round with ecclesiastical barriers, and despised the Gentiles, whom they placed outside the pale of the divine covenant.

We have already seen that we should think of revelation as existing in degrees, and that we are helped in so thinking of it by an evolutionary view of the world, which shows a purpose at work which progressively manifests itself. Redemption is a word which has to do with human nature. Man is the crown of

creation so far as creation is visible to us ; and the creative activity of God reaches its height in the creation of free, spiritual beings like ourselves. Here is the real meaning of creation, the revelation or self-expression of God in a society of free, moral personalities. Now, having called free human spirits into existence, would God leave them alone ? The Bible says " No." It depicts God as Redeemer, that is, as wanting to help these free spirits to rise to the level of their spiritual capacities. He reveals Himself to them in terms of character, comes to meet them in their search for Him, seeks to lead them on in knowledge of Himself, is ready to share their life so that, aided by the divine power, they may overcome sin and grow into fellowship with Himself.

If we think out the implications of the idea of redemption, we shall see that, as in the case of the idea of creation, there is nothing arbitrary about the idea. It is the expression of the very nature of God. God is a Being of such a kind that to redeem is His natural mode of activity.

We turn to the New Testament and we find God depicted as Love. Love is set out as the very essence of His character. Now surely the characteristic of love, as we know it in ourselves, is that it is an expansive energy.

It flows out of itself upon others, and grows richer by so doing. Love's nature is to give of its fulness to others. If God is Love, must not self-giving, self-sacrifice, be the very law of His life? He created the universe in love, that He might have an object upon which His Love might be poured. He called human personalities into existence that between them and Himself there might be a fellowship of Love. He came (and this is the heart of the Christian creed) Himself as a man to earth in love for the human race. We have moved far away from that conception of God which still so largely dominates popular thought, the conception of a distant autocrat who acts almost irresponsibly just because He chooses to act ; and we have reached a richer and far more satisfying conception, the conception of Him as the Spirit of Holy Love "in whom we live and move and have our being" ; who creates because Love must create ; who redeems because necessity is laid upon Love so to do ; who dies for men, because Love rejoices to go to the extreme of self-sacrifice. Everywhere and always He is revealing Himself, wanting to give men just as much of Himself as they can receive.

Revelation has been presented as being

nothing arbitrary but as the necessary expression of the divine nature. We must, however, guard against a possible misunderstanding. The God who thus of necessity expresses Himself is all the while doing so freely. If we may use a self-contradictory phrase, His is a free necessity. Pantheism regards the universe as a kind of emanation of God ; it flows from Him as water flows from a spring. But theism insists that creation is the act of the volition of a Personal Being, who freely creates because it is His personal nature to do so. The universe owes its origin to His volition, and by His will He keeps it in being. This is a very important point because it leads back to that problem which physical science has made so prominent. Is the universe a self-contained system with a fixed amount of energy and no possibility of any interference from outside with its working ? Adequately to discuss that problem would require a careful review of the whole question of miracle and the supernatural. Here all that need be said is this ; that, if you grant the existence of a Personal Creative Will behind the universe there seems no valid reason for assuming that that Will has not reserves of power which it can use for special purposes.

Why should God be tied by His evolution? Why should He not intensify at special points the creative activity which He is always displaying? Revelation, as the Bible presents it to us, is certainly not the self-expression of a God who is tied or bound in any way. It is the free self-manifestation of a Personal Being, whose only fetter is the impossibility of doing anything which contradicts His own character.

“I have declared, and I have saved, and I have shewed.” Thus the great, unknown prophet of the Exile, whom we call Second Isaiah describes God as speaking. And all through the Old Testament God is presented as revealing Himself to man, that man may enter into intelligent communion with Him. He is a God who searches for man that He may help him and redeem him; but the man must want to be found and to be helped. God’s spiritual gifts are not forced upon us. Divine truth cannot compel, it can only draw. And so it remains for us to enter, if we will, into our heritage, and by accepting what God offers to grow into closer fellowship with Him. Can you set before a human being any quest more splendid than the search for God, a search which is never fruitless and with it brings its own reward?

CHAPTER IV

PRIMITIVE RELIGION

Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him DEUT. iv. 35.

IN the three lectures of this series which have been already given we have been dealing with introductory matter. We have discussed in a general way the idea of Revelation, and have seen that the Old Testament is a marvellous text-book of religious experience. So remarkable was that experience, so unlike was the idea of God reached by the Hebrew prophets to the idea of God found among other contemporary nations that we are compelled to call in, as the Hebrews did themselves, the idea of revelation to account for it. Here we feel was some special action of God upon the minds of the religious teachers of that race.

So much for the prolegomena. We come now to closer grips with our subject: the idea of God in the Old Testament. But even now it is impossible to plunge into that subject without making a few more preliminary remarks

which are for the most part of the nature of cautions, which we shall do well to bear in mind.

1. There is a development of the idea of God in the Old Testament. The revelation is progressive. It climbs from less to more, from primitive and imperfect conceptions of God to the magnificent thoughts of Him which you find for example in Second Isaiah. But the development is not uniform or along a single line. Viewing it as a whole we may rightly speak of it as an advance ; but within the general advance are movements of retrogression and decline ; and also movements in different directions. Dr. Jeavons has called it a “radiative or dispersive” development. There is a parallel in the evolution of living organisms. We can trace a broad line of progress from the amoeba to the vertebrates, and within the vertebrates up to man ; but all the while life has been trying experiments, branching out into different directions and creating various types of organism, the mollusc, the worm, the insect. It is impossible therefore, to present Old Testament theology as a uniform development. The matter is not so simple as that.

2. Within this Old Testament movement are several different conceptions of God.

They do not always harmonize. In actual fact there was competition between them, just as to-day, even among Christians, there are differing ideas of God.

3. In trying to sketch out this evolution of the idea of God in Hebrew scripture we have to be very cautious (i) that we do not read back into primitive times later conceptions of God ; (ii) or make the reverse mistake and assume that, let us say, Abraham's conception of God was at a far lower level than David's conception. A great religious leader such as Moses may have had a conception of God greatly in advance of that of his time, which has not been preserved for us. God "giveth not the spirit by measure." The genius in any department appears suddenly, and you cannot explain him.

4. Our problem is enormously complicated by the fact that the Old Testament as we have it now is the product of a continuous literary activity. Its documents have been subjected to a process of re-editing and revision. We cannot, for example, take the narratives of the patriarchs and assume that here we have the original tradition handed down unaltered. Those early traditions were worked up or interpreted by later schools of writers who

modified them in accordance with their own ideas or purposes. Thus you find some of the patriarchal narratives coloured with the ideas of the later priestly school of writers, while others reflect the ideas of a later prophetic school. To-day, with our more developed sense of history and our jealous regard for literary proprietorship we should not take an ancient writing and re-edit it so as to make it a vehicle for our own ideas. We should preserve it untouched. But in those days the literary standards were different. Writers then had no hesitation in issuing a book under the name of some great man ; or in re-editing an ancient document so as to make it reflect later ideas. After all, let us remember what the Old Testament was to the Jew. It was the record of God's special dealing with his race ; it was his manual of religious experience. It was full of lessons for every age. It was very natural, therefore, that successive ages should, in a religious interest, take ancient traditions and documents and give them a new setting suitable to the changed conditions. This continuous literary activity bears witness to a continuous and growing religious experience. Take the case of the Psalms. If they had all been written by David, we should have had a less impressive

phenomenon than we have when we realize that they were the product of centuries. The faith of one man is a less striking thing than the faith of a series of writers spread over hundreds of years. But observe the difficulty which this continuous literary activity creates for the modern critical historian, who is trying to trace out accurately the evolution of Hebrew religion. How can he say what was Abraham's idea of God when he knows that the narrative which tells about Abraham was written centuries after Abraham? How far is that narrative faithful to a genuine ancient tradition; how far has it been coloured by the ideas of the age when the tradition was put into writing?

5. When we are trying to discover the origins of Israel's religion in its earliest stages, we are faced by this fact, that we have nothing except very uncertain tradition upon which to go. Biblical chronology is still largely undetermined, but if the date of the Exodus from Egypt can be fixed somewhere about 1270 B.C., then the probability is that Abraham's date is 900 years earlier. Now the Old Testament narratives of Abraham belong, as we have them now, to two dates. One section of them belongs to the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., the other to the age of Ezekiel

and the Exile, or even later. This means that our written story of Abraham is to be dated at least 1200-1300 years after Abraham lived. We may find that this narrative embodies earlier documents, and we know how tenacious tradition is in the East. But when we have made all allowance for this we are confronted with the plain fact that the patriarchal narratives cannot in a true sense be regarded as history. We need not doubt that Abraham was a real person, and that the Hebrews had good reason for regarding him as the religious ancestor of their race. We need not reduce him to a solar-myth or to a purely ideal figure. But that a large amount of idealizing comes into the narrative is plain. We are dealing with idealized tradition, not with history, when we read the stories of the patriarchs. And this is a striking fact. A hundred years ago what lay behind early Hebrew history was largely a blank. To-day historical and archæological research has recovered for us some of that teeming life of Egypt and Palestine and the Mediterranean basin. We know that there were populous empires with a rich civilization. There were trade routes, and we see the caravan on the march. But as regards the patriarchs there is utter silence. Nothing has been

discovered about them. They live only in the pages of the Old Testament ; only in the distant traditions of their own race.

Therefore, it is not till we reach history proper that we can sketch with any certainty the development of Israel's religion ; and even then we have always to remember that later generations re-edited earlier documents. Much of our reconstruction of the origins of Hebrew religion must be tentative. Yet there are some facts about which we can be reasonably sure. We pass on now to consider what these are.

Hebrew Ethnic Religion.

One certain fact is that the Hebrews had a religion before they became the recipients of any special revelation. Thus we read in Joshua xxiv. 2 : " And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor ; and *they served other gods.*"

The Hebrew people was a branch of the Semitic race, and there were many elements in Hebrew religion which were shared by all the Semites. In other words, there was an ethnic religion upon which was superimposed

the special religion which we believe was given to the Hebrews by revelation. This ethnic religion long survived ; in fact, as we shall see, it survives to-day in Palestine. There are many traces of it in the Old Testament ; and it is from these that we gather our materials for sketching the primitive Hebrew conception of God. We must not make the mistake of supposing that all the Israelites were at the same level of religious development. What we have in the Old Testament is the religion of the minority, of the leaders, of those whose spiritual eye was most clear. The popular religion was at a lower level and contained many elements of a superstitious or even degrading character. We can see how the prophets were continually striving to raise the level of the popular religion and how they inveighed against its more unworthy elements.

The story then of the Old Testament is the story of an advance through struggle. The light tries to conquer the darkness. Purer and nobler ideas of God contend with less pure ideas. The advance goes on till we reach in the greatest of the prophets a conception of God unique in its sublimity and purity.

Let us now see some of the traces of this primitive, ethnical religion in the Old Testament.

(a) We read in Deut. xii. 2, 3: "Ye shall surely destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills and under every green tree; and ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods."¹ It is clear that there were local shrines where worship was offered. When the Israelites settled in Canaan they found these local shrines used by the Canaanites. They began to use them themselves. In the eighth century Amos and Hosea had denounced them as centres of immorality and idolatry. "Come to Bethel and transgress; to Gilgal and multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days."² "My people ask counsel at their stock, and their staff declareth unto them . . . they sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and terebinths because the shadow thereof is good."³

In the seventh century, to which date the Book of Deuteronomy belongs, these high places

¹ Asherim were sacred poles or trees near the altar.

² Amos iv. 4.

³ Hosea, iv. 12, 13.

were attacked, and they were destroyed in the reformation of King Josiah ; but the use of them still went on ; as we can see from the complaints of Ezekiel shortly before the fall of Jerusalem. " Behold I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places." ¹ After the exile the practice still continued, and we find a passage in Isaiah which may perhaps be dated 450 B.C., which runs : " Ye that inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every green tree, that slay the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks. Among the smooth stones of the valley is thy portion ; they, they are thy lot : even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered an oblation. Shall I be appeased for these things ? " ²

In earlier days Eli was priest of a temple at Shiloh ; Gideon set up a shrine at Ophrah ³ ; Jephthah worshipped at a sanctuary at Mizpah ⁴. In Genesis Shechem, Bethel and Beersheba are mentioned as holy places rendered sacred by the tradition that the patriarchs worshipped at them.

To this very day the Syrian peasant in Palestine worships at a local shrine, and worships the local deity connected with the

¹ vi. 3.² lvii. 5, 6.³ Judges, viii. 27.⁴ Judges, xi. 11.

shrine. If you questioned him he would profess his belief in One God ; but in actual fact he venerates a local deity as well. In Curtiss's *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day* are many instances of this local worship. He says that in his travels he counted more than fifty shrines in an area of thirty miles ; and he records how on the wall of a shrine near Damascus, the alleged birthplace of Abraham, is the following inscription : " Advice to those who visit this place, where is Abraham, the father of Isaac the sacrificed, the grandfather of the prophets ! Come, tell him all your adversities and hardships, and he will help you." ¹

Human nature remains much the same through the centuries and in matters of religion is extraordinarily conservative. The habit of worship of a local deity at a local shrine is just the kind of habit which would remain unchanged through thousands of years. So that when we find to-day in Palestine worship at local shrines going on it confirms us in our belief that such worship characterized the religion of Israel from the earliest days of the Old Testament and characterized Semitic religion as a whole.

¹ Quoted from Pace's *Ideas of God in Israel*. I am indebted to this volume for some material in this and the succeeding chapter.

Superstition dies hard ; and it is not surprising that the doctrine of the One God won its way only slowly and in the face of great opposition. In point of fact there is ample evidence to show that down to Hezekiah's reign worship at local shrines was not regarded as inconsistent with the demands of the loftiest religion.

It is worth while to pause here for a moment and mark the difference in general outlook between ourselves and these primitive Israelites. We have local churches and we can offer in them a true worship to the One God. But in those early days the doctrine of the One God had not established itself. Men believed in national gods. Yahweh¹ was originally conceived as a national God. He was indeed

¹ It will be convenient to deal here with the following point. The name "Jehovah" has come down to us from Old Testament translations. But the Jews knew no such name. The sacred name of revelation for them was JHW(V)H, Hebrew not printing the vowels, when it was a living language. About the sixth century A.D. vowel points were added in order to try to preserve the traditional pronunciation of the language, after it was no longer spoken.

There are injunctions in the Law against any light or casual employment of the sacred name, and these injunctions were later interpreted by the Rabbis as meaning that the sacred name should never be uttered.

When the systematic attempt was made to preserve the traditional text of the Old Testament in the sixth century, the vowel points of another name for God "Adonai" (my Lord) were added to the consonants JHWH as an indication to the reader that he must in reading aloud substitute the name "Adonai" for the sacred name. In 1518 A.D. it was assumed that the vowels of "Adonai" were the real vowels of JHWH. Hence you get the form "Jehovah" produced; the first "a" in Adonai being capable of pronunciation either as "a" or "e." The true pronunciation of JHWH is probably "Yahweh."

superior to the gods of other nations, but these other gods were thought of as real. Worship at local shrines, when the creed of monotheism is not fully accepted, is obviously full of dangers. And the two main reasons why the prophets attacked this local worship were that they saw it imperilled the doctrine of the One God, which it was their mission to proclaim; and that it tended to degrade the conception of God, because this local worship was bound up with grossly superstitious and immoral rites; whereas the prophets were concerned to maintain the moral character of Yahweh and to insist that He required morality in His worshippers.

(b) Another feature in this primitive religion was the sacred stone, or sacred tree, which stood often in proximity to the local shrine.

Jacob, we read, set up a pillar at Bethel after his vision, calling the place "God's house."¹ At Gilgal were the stones which tradition said were set up when Israel crossed Jordan.² There was a great stone at Gibeon, and another at Shechem under the oak by the sanctuary of Jehovah.³ And these stones continued to be venerated even in post-exilic days. Very

¹ Genesis xxviii. 18.

² Joshua iv. 20.

³ I Kings iii. 4; Joshua xxiv. 26.

famous were the oaks of Mamre, where Abraham built an altar. "And Abraham moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord."¹ At Bethel was an oak, sacred because Deborah, Rebecca's nurse was buried under it.² In Samuel we read how the mulberry trees, like the oaks of Dodona in the Greek story, were supposed to utter oracles, and how the sound of marching was heard in their leafy tops, when David went out to fight the Philistines.³

Curtiss, quoting a missionary, writes of modern Palestine: "A tree at Gaza-el-Maisi is distinctly held to be indwelt by a divine spirit, and accordingly receives divine honours."⁴ We find precisely the same beliefs among primitive African tribes to-day. Trees are regarded as the abodes of spirits, who have to be appeased. They are the homes of nature-demons. A missionary writes: "Perhaps these demons owe their origin to something in nature which strikes terror into the primitive heart. The weird solitude of the wilderness, wild rocky places with little vegetation, the glow of

¹ Genesis xiii. 18.

² Genesis xxxv. 8.

³ II Samuel v. 24.

⁴ Quoted from Pace, *op. cit.* p. 24.

the setting sun on the bare branches of the uncanny baobab trees, or the same trees illuminated by the silvery beams of the moon, dark silent pools in the gloomy shades of a thicket, caves which seem to suggest an invisible tenant—all these lend themselves to a primitive imagination under the influence of chronic fear.¹

(c) One other feature of this primitive worship may be mentioned, before we pass to the conclusion of this chapter, the presence of the stone pillar or obelisk, called “mazeba,” and of the wooden pole called “ashera.”

Deuteronomy forbids the erection of a stone pillar beside the altar of God. “Neither shalt thou set thee up a pillar; which the Lord thy God hateth.”² The condemnation of the practice implies that it existed; and there is ample evidence to show that it did. Thus we read: “And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.”³ We have seen how Jacob set up the stone on which he had rested; and it was clearly more

¹ Dale, *The Peoples of Zanzibar*, p. 35.

² xvi. 22.

³ Exodus xxiv. 4.

than a memorial ; for he poured oil on the top of it, and called it " God's house."

The " ashera," which the Authorized Version translates as " grove " was a sacred tree or pole standing near the altar. If there was no growing tree at the place where a local shrine was erected, it was natural to make a pole take its place. These poles may have been " the wooden symbols of the goddess Asherah " ;¹ and in any case they were part of the ordinary religious furniture of a Canaanite altar, and they were used by the Israelites. Their erection was prohibited in the Deuteronomic legislation, and the prophets mention them with disapproval.

Subsequent chapters will deal with some more of these primitive elements in Semite religion. Let us end with some general reflections on the situation presented to us, as we read our Old Testament in the light of modern scholarship.

I. We cannot study the Old Testament intelligently unless we put behind us once and for all the old idea that everything in it is dictated by God ; that it is all divine, that its writers were so inspired that they became mere mouthpieces of God. The Old Testament is a

¹ So the R. V. explains in a note to Exodus xxxiv. 13.

national literature, and as such it contains writings of very different kinds, and of very different spiritual values. There is a wonderful divine element in the Old Testament, but there is a large human element as well. None of its writers were turned into registering machines. They preserved their individuality, wrote each in his own style, made mistakes, as men do ; had no access to special stores of information about the historical events or scientific facts, which were not equally available for their contemporaries. In this national literature are elements of legend and tradition, coming down from a long past, such as you find in all national literatures. The stories of the patriarchs belong to this traditional element, and, as we have already seen, it is impossible to say precisely what amount of historical fact lies behind them.

2. Now this ethnic, primitive religion, with its local shrines, sacred stones and the like, belongs to the human element. It is not concerned with what we call revelation at all. In a larger use of the word revelation it is true to say that God was in a measure revealing something of Himself even to these primitive Canaanite nature-worshippers, for He has never "left Himself without witness" in the human

heart. But when we speak of revelation, we usually mean the special knowledge of God which was given to the religious writers and teachers of the Hebrew people.

3. This ethnic religion formed the framework within which the special revelation was given ; it provided materials out of which a purer religion was constructed. The sculptor takes a lump of stone or marble from the quarry. It is rough and stained, and in its rude state has many imperfections. But all these he clears away, and slowly shapes it into a thing of beauty. Out of the old he brings forth the new. So (and we shall see some examples of this in the next chapter) the Spirit of God utilized this material of natural religion for higher purposes, and upon it built a nobler creed.

Picture Abraham worshipping at the oaks of Mamre. He was doing what his ethnic religion bade him do. He was following the practice of the Semites, who venerated sacred trees as the homes of local deities. He doubtless shared in the belief in local deities. But surely there were elements in his faith which went far beyond anything that was to be found in contemporary religion. Unless his story is simply the creation of pious writers writing

centuries later, unless there was no trustworthy tradition attaching to his name, we must hold that he had an idea of God which was more spiritual than the generally prevailing idea. There was a germ there which was to grow ; there were potentialities in his belief. He was experiencing God in a way which contained the promise of a richer experience to come. We cannot, of course, say what Abraham's idea of God was, because we have only a history of Abraham written centuries later ; but if God was to give a revelation of Himself to the Hebrews, a start had to be made somewhere, and why not with Abraham, about whom (so we judge) the nation had a vivid and living tradition ?

Not long ago I was staying in the same house with Archdeacon Lloyd, the veteran Uganda missionary, who made the famous march through the 400 miles of the Congo Forest and discovered the pygmies, whom Stanley had come across earlier. He told me that he was taken to a pygmy settlement, and there in the middle of their circle of tiny huts was a larger hut which was their temple. " Whom do you worship ? " " We worship the Great Spirit, who made the white man and the trees and the animals, who made us and all the tribes of men."

“What do you know about Him?” “He is very cruel, and hates us. He sends the wild beasts to kill us, and the snakes to poison us; and he sends our enemies to attack us. We have to keep Him in a good temper.” And there in the hut-temple were pots of honey and fruit and flowers, offerings to the cruel Creator.

Now imagine one of these pygmies receiving an idea that the Great Spirit loved him and took an interest in him. What a profound difference it would make to his whole religion! He might still have very imperfect and superstitious ideas of God, but he would have reached something out of which a whole world of new conceptions might grow. And all his traditional customary acts of worship would be filled with new meaning. So, surely, it was with Abraham. Some new vision of God had come to him, and his primitive faith and living experience of God were the seeds which ripened slowly into the purer knowledge and richer assurance of God which came to his descendants hundreds of years later.

4. Biblical criticism, literary and historical, has made the Bible live again, just because it has helped us to set this literature against its background. Origin and ending; the promise and the achievement; the raw material and

the finished product—how much better we understand all this to-day. Once in a desert place divine hands took a few loaves and fishes, and the food thus blessed became the sustenance for a multitude. So, long ago, God, who wished to reveal Himself to men, took a primitive faith with all its crudities and superstitions, and utilized it for higher purposes. We must look to the end, not to the beginning. What matters is not what Old Testament religion sprang from, but what it became. A lowly origin does not discredit a noble ending. A thing is not worth less because it has grown out of something of inferior value. The achievement of the prophets stands, a conception of God which is the basis of all our modern thought about God. We bow in wonder before it. We see in it evidence of a divine revelation. We say that these prophets were taught of God.

5. The new light cast on the Bible by modern scholarship has compelled us to revise our conception of Inspiration. The Church has never defined what it meant by inspiration ; but up to about eighty years ago the view obtained generally that if a statement was in the Bible it was true. The Bible was treated as something isolated, as a collection of writings

which somehow had come from God, and therefore were to be accepted without criticism. Such a view is untenable. That the writers of the Bible were inspired, that is taught of God, is a belief which can be rationally defended ; but their inspiration did not make them mere registering machines, or give them superhuman knowledge on matters of science or history. We call them inspired because of the spiritual message they give ; because their religious teaching comes home to us, and commends itself to our spiritual natures. But this spiritual message is enshrined in a framework which is human : “ we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” It loses nothing of its value because of this. Nay, rather, the more you emphasize the human side of the Bible, the more does its divine side stand out. We can test the matter for ourselves by putting ourselves to school with the Bible, and letting its spiritual teaching sink into our minds. In proportion as we do that, shall we be ready to echo the words of the Psalmist : “ Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.” “ The opening of Thy word giveth light ; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” ¹

Spiritual truth has to be spiritually discerned.

¹ cxix. 130.

God reveals Himself to those who seek for Him, who wait upon Him with expectant souls ; to those who “ hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Nothing that biblical criticism has said touches this quality of the Bible, its spiritual illuminativeness, its power of awaking conscience and satisfying the needs and aspirations of the soul. We call it—not the words—but the Word of God, because the Living God moves through it from first to last and in its varied message speaks to the depths of our personality.

CHAPTER V

PRIMITIVE RELIGION (*continued*)

Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness ; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work. 2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

WE were discussing in the last chapter some of the primitive religious ideas and practices of the Hebrews. There was an original ethnic religion, shared in common with other Semites, upon which was superimposed the special revelation (for such we are compelled to call it) given to this people. The older ethnic religion was not swept away at a stroke. On the contrary, among the mass of the people it lingered on for centuries, and with it the superstitions and imperfect notions of God, against which the prophets continually inveighed. The Old Testament is full of traces of this earlier faith. It was not God's method to substitute suddenly one creed for another ; but rather to take the old and gradually leaven it with the new ; to utilize an old framework as a vehicle for the teaching of new truth.

A familiar illustration of this method of

revelation is afforded by the story of the Flood. In 1872 there was discovered in the Library of Asshurbanipal at Kouyunjik the Babylonian story of the Flood. That the Babylonians possessed such a story had been long known, because Berosus, a Chaldæan priest in the Temple of Bel (Marduk) at Babylon, whom the Church historian Eusebius describes as being a contemporary of Alexander the Great, wrote a *History of Babylon*, containing the account of the Flood, and fragments of this history are quoted in other authors. But till Mr. G. Smith made his discovery in 1872 we had no actual Babylonian record before us.

Now the Flood story is part of a great Babylonian epic, which tells of the famous deeds of Gilgamesh, the hero of Uruk (the Erech of Genesis, x. 10). Gilgamesh had an ancestor Ut-napishtim, who, it was said, had been given the gift of immortality. Anxious to discover how he had obtained it, Gilgamesh decides to visit him; and after a hazardous journey finds him on the further shore of the Waters of Death. Ut-napishtim tells him how he had been preserved at the time of the great Flood because of his piety, and how subsequently the god Bel had made him immortal. He narrates how some of the gods had determined

to destroy the city of Shurippak, lying on the Euphrates, by a flood, and how Ea, the lord of wisdom, had advised him to escape by building a great ship. The following is the translation of the poem : ¹

O man of Shurippak, son of Ubaratutu,
Frame a house, build a ship :
Forsake (thy) possessions, seek (to save) life ;
Abandon (thy) goods, and cause thy soul to live :
Bring up into the midst of the ship the seed of life
of every sort.

On the fifth day I began to construct the frame of
the ship.

In its hull its sides were 120 cubits high.
And its deck was likewise 120 cubits in breadth :
I built on the bow and fastened all firmly together.
Then I built six decks in it,
So that it was divided into seven storeys.
The interior (of each storey) I divided into nine
compartments ;
I drove in plugs (to fill up crevices).
I looked out a mast, and added all that was needful.
Six sars of bitumen I spread over it for caulking.

With all that I possessed I laded it.

With the seed of life of every kind that I possessed,
I laded it.

I took on board all my family and my servants,
Cattle of the field, beasts of the field, craftsmen
also, all of them, did I take on board.

Then follows an account of the storm which

¹ Quoted from Driver's "Genesis," in the *Westminster Commentaries*.

raged for six days and nights. On the seventh day was a calm :

The sea was calm, hurricane and deluge ceased.
I beheld the land, and cried aloud.
For the whole of mankind were turned to clay,
Hedged fields had become marshes.
I opened a window, and the light fell upon my face.

The vessel grounded on Mount Nisir, a mountain east of the river Tigris, and remained there six days :

When the seventh day arrived,
I brought forth a dove and let it go :
The dove went to and fro ;
As there was no resting-place, it turned back.
I brought forth a swallow and let it go ;
The swallow went to and fro :
As there was no resting-place, it turned back.
I brought forth a raven and let it go :
The raven went and saw the decrease of the waters ;
It ate, it waded, it croaked, it turned not back.

Ut-napishtim then leaves the ark, and like Noah, sacrifices :

I prepared an offering on the summit of the mountain.
.
.
.
The gods smelt the savour,
The gods smelt the goodly savour ;
The gods gathered like flies over the sacrifices.

The similarities between this Babylonian story and the story in Genesis are so close that there can be no question that both stories have a

common source. Note the resemblances. The hero of the Flood in the Babylonian story is (according to Berosus, the Babylonian historian) the tenth of the antediluvian kings, just as Noah is tenth from Adam. In both stories the Ark is made of specified dimensions, though the dimensions are not the same. In both it is made water-tight with bitumen, and grounds on a mountain. In both the flood is due to rain only. Both record the sending out of birds, when the flood had abated; in both the respective heroes offer sacrifices, of which Yahweh and the gods smell the savour.

It is certain, too, that the Hebrew story is derived from the Babylonian story, and not the Babylonian from the Hebrew, for the Babylonian story is much older than Genesis; and also the story presupposes a flat country like Mesopotamia, liable to inundations, and not a hilly country like Palestine.

Can we indicate in any way how the Hebrew story may have been derived from the other? At what periods and through what channels did Babylonian influence affect Israel?

(a) Some have held that, since Ur of the Chaldees is represented as the ancestral home of Abraham, and since there is no reason to doubt that the branch of the Semites to which

the Hebrews belonged did originally come from Babylonia, the Hebrews brought with them to Palestine this Babylonian Flood story. It is probable that they did preserve some reminiscences of their primitive home. For example, the account of Paradise with its rivers seems to reflect the luxuriance of the plains of Babylon ; and the story of the tower of Babel recalls the Ziggurat or pyramid-shaped tower which we know adorned the Babylonian temples. But it is unlikely that the Flood story represents a tradition carried by the Hebrews in their original migration, for this reason. In Genesis there are parallel accounts of the Flood which belong to different documents. One of these accounts is in the document known as " P," or the Priestly Code of Law, which was promulgated about the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and formed the basis of their reforms. " P " gives the story of the nation from the beginning. The first chapter of Genesis belongs to it, and it runs right through the Pentateuch, being combined with other documents, which can be clearly distinguished by various marks. Now the account of the Flood in " P " is closer in many details to the Babylonian original, than the parallel account in the other document : and " P " is a later document of the fifth

century. Is it likely that, if the preservation of an extremely primitive tradition was the source of the similarity between the two stories, you would find that similarity most marked the further you get away from the fountain head? As a rule "stories received from foreign sources become more and more transformed in the course of the centuries, yielding at last but mere hints and suggestions of their original sources." ¹

(b) We must look, therefore, for a better explanation; and archæological research has helped us to find it. In the British Museum are what are known as the Tel-el-Amarna Tablets, which were discovered in 1887 on the east bank of the Nile about 170 miles south of Cairo. They were written about 1400 B.C. and show, before the Hebrews migrated from Egypt at the Exodus, that Palestine was an Egyptian province under Egyptian governors. But they also show that the Babylonian language was the language used for official communications between the leading nations of the East at that time. And further discoveries at Lachish, Gezer and Taanach show that the same Babylonian language was used for private letters and business accounts. With the Babylonian

¹ Gordon, *The Early Traditions of Genesis*, p. 65.

language must have gone Babylonian ideas and culture, and we have proof of the influence in Palestine of Babylonian art. Is it not reasonable to suppose that Babylonian religious traditions would also have penetrated into the country ?

Accordingly, many scholars maintain that here is the explanation of the similarity between the stories in the Bible and those on the Babylonian tablets. When the Hebrews entered Palestine they found the Canaanite inhabitants familiar with these Babylonian traditions, and learned them from the people they conquered. This would make the reign of David, when the Hebrews were masters of Palestine, the period at which this Babylonian influence made itself felt.

(c) But it is probably impossible to fix upon any one period as that which accounts for these similarities. Babylonian influence was felt over a long stretch of time ; and we know that there were other periods, when contact with Babylon was specially close ; for instance during the reign of Ahaz in the eighth century, when the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pilezer III invaded Israel ; or again during the Exile ; and we must remember that the document " P " is post-exilic.

Now the similarities between the two Flood stories are one thing ; the differences are quite another. And it is the differences which are important. Here are some of them. In the Babylonian story we have polytheism. Many gods are presented, who quarrel among themselves, and are full of evil passions. In Genesis we have, in both documents, monotheism. There is but one God. He governs the storm ; He possesses a moral character. The Flood is a judgment upon sin. And though He is portrayed as a God of Judgment, He is also shewn as a God of tender compassion for His world, who makes a covenant with Noah and his descendants, and remembers even the animals, including them in the covenant. And though in the Hebrew narrative there is the naïve touch of anthropomorphism which pictures God as smelling the savour of Noah's offering, there is nothing of the crudity of the Babylonian account with its gods swarming like flies above the sacrifices.

We have to account for these differences. How was it that the Hebrews were thus able to purify a Semitic tradition, and utilize its framework as a vehicle for teaching a lofty ethical monotheism ? We give the answer, that the Hebrew writers were " inspired," that is, taught

of God. Their inspiration lies in the loftiness of their idea of God, and in the religious message and moral lessons they draw out of their narrative. They had no more knowledge of secular things than anyone else at the time. Their history is at times wrong ; their science is puerile. They put down in their narratives statements which we know belong to myth and legend ; but all the while they are possessed of a marvellous spiritual insight, and of a conception of God which has no parallel in contemporary literature ; a conception which grows, until it reaches the lofty ethical monotheism of the prophets.

This has been to some extent a digression ; but we have not wandered far from our main theme, the primitive elements in Hebrew religion. We have seen how, under the teaching of God, the Hebrews were able to give a new content, a richer filling, to traditional elements which they shared with other branches of the Semite race. Just as Jesus taught by parable, using an earthly story to convey a heavenly meaning, so God taught the religious writers of this race by myth and legend. You tell your child a fairy-story which has a moral. The story is not historically true ; but it has moral truth, truth of idea. These early narratives

in Genesis are God's fairy-stories ; through which He has taught, and is teaching, all who will be receptive as a child, the great elementary truths of religion and morality. We can only bow in reverent wonder before the simple sublimity, the moral majesty of these stories, whose religious message is matched by their exquisite art.

It has been pointed out that in the primitive religion of Israel worship at local shrines and under sacred trees was common, and that such worship continued in the popular religion for centuries ; indeed it is found to-day in Palestine. Other features of this primitive religion were the setting up of stone pillars or of poles of wood. The Old Testament bears ample witness to these practices. Certain other elements, too, in this primitive worship must be mentioned that we may complete our outline survey.

First, there was sacrifice, which played such an important part in the religion of Israel, right down to New Testament times. Sacrifice was an institution common to all the Semites, as indeed to many nations in different parts of the world. Its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity. What is its significance ? Here the scholars differ. Probably no one explanation of the practice contains the whole

truth about it. It represents the blending of different elements, and is an expression of more than one desire and thought in the mind of the worshipper. (a) The simplest explanation of sacrifice is that which sees in it a gift from the worshipper to his god. The worshipper presents the god with something which he thinks will please him and win his favour. Such action need not necessarily be interpreted as selfish or commercial, because, though the idea of winning the god's favour may be present, it does not follow that that is the only motive in the worshipper's mind. He gives because it is natural for him to do so. It is an expression of his dependence on God, a recognition that he has received blessings from Him. When the modern villager brings his apples or vegetables to a Harvest Service he is moved by unselfish motives. Are we to say that primitive worshippers were devoid of all these higher feelings? The Old Testament certainly regards sacrifices as gifts. The word "minha" (gift or offering) is used over a hundred times in connection with sacrificial offerings made to God. And the first sacrifice recorded in the Old Testament, that of Cain and Abel, is regarded as a gift. (b) The explanation of sacrifice which is perhaps most in favour with

scholars to-day is that propounded by Robertson Smith, that the heart of the rite is the sacred meal in which both the god and his worshippers partake. What was offered was an animal, which was held to be of the same blood as the god and the worshipper. "The actual life of the sacred and kindred animal . . . is actually distributed among all the participants, each of whom incorporates a particle of it with his own individual life." ¹ Robertson Smith's view of sacrifice implies that totemism was part of the religion of Israel ; but there are only doubtful traces of totemism in the Old Testament. A totem is "a natural object, not an individual, but one of a class, taken by a tribe, a family, or a single person, and treated with superstitious respect as an outward symbol of an existing intimate unseen relation." ² The core of totemism, which certainly has played a large part in primitive religion all the world over, is the belief in some real kinship of nature between the totem object and the group which has adopted it. Spencer and Gillen have recently investigated the religion of the aboriginal tribes of Australia, and have produced some remarkable examples of totemistic beliefs.

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, ed. 2, p. 313.

² Kautzsch in Article "Religions of Israel," *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, V., p. 613.

The following may serve as an illustration of what is meant by totemism. The Arunta tribe have as their totem a certain grub called the witchetty grub. This they seek to multiply. After certain ceremonies have been performed at a place associated with the ancestors of the tribe, the grub is pronounced "tabu," and must on no account be eaten till it is plentiful. When it is plentiful large supplies are gathered, brought into camp, cooked, and stored away. Later they are taken to the men's camp, when all the men assemble. The grubs are then ground up between two stones, and distributed to be eaten. The purport of the ceremony is to identify the members of the totem group with the totem. They share a common life; there is an essential kinship between the two.¹

Because of the doubt whether totemistic beliefs were present in the religion of Israel, Robertson Smith's special theory of sacrifice has taken the wider form of maintaining in general terms that the sacrifice knits the god and the worshipper together. The god and the worshipper share in a common meal. We have in I Samuel, xiv. 32-35 an early record of a sacrifice, in which the blood is offered to God as His portion. Saul, discovering that his

¹ cp. Spencer & Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, pp. 203-4.

soldiers were eating the animals taken from the enemy with their blood, bids them stop, on the ground that the blood belonged to God. He builds an altar and sees that the sacrifice is carried out in due order. The idea of a common meal plainly underlies this narrative.

The root of the idea of sacrifice is then probably to be found in the notion of a common meal, though we cannot exclude the idea of a gift. Nor must we forget that sacrifices were frequently expiatory ; offered as an atonement for wrong-doing. We can see how what began as a common meal would quickly take on a sacramental colour. Animals and the fruits of the earth were the gifts of the gods. By feasting on these gifts it came to be believed that you were feasting on the god himself. And it is a common opinion among primitive peoples that by eating anything you assimilate its qualities. Thus by eating a warrior of a hostile tribe you assimilate his bravery ; and by eating the god, symbolized or represented by the sacrifice, you acquire his divine qualities. The Christian sacrament of Holy Communion wins new meaning when studied in the light of this long history of the rite of sacrifice.

It must, however, be remembered that, as Judaism developed and was succeeded by

Christianity the cultus of sacrifice disappeared. The Epistle to the Hebrews is concerned to show that the Old Testament sacrificial system was merely preparatory and transitory. Spiritual religion requires no bloodstained altars. God is a Spirit, and the worship which is acceptable to Him as the prophets of Israel themselves declared, is the worship of the uplifted heart and consecrated will.

Was the worship of animals part of Hebrew primitive religion? Such worship is common in many parts of the world, the religion of ancient Egypt providing us with one of the most striking examples. There is evidence in the Old Testament that animals were originally worshipped, and that such worship survived to comparatively late times. Thus Ezekiel, writing at the time of the Exile, describes what he saw in vision in the Temple: "So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel . . . with every man his censer in his hand; and the odour of the cloud of incense went up." ¹

¹ viii. 10, 11.

In Leviticus is a code of law called the Holiness Code, which in its present form is about the same date as Ezekiel. In it is this prohibition: "And they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices unto the he-goats."¹ In II Chronicles we read that King Jeroboam "appointed him priests for the high places and for the he-goats."² Isaiah predicts the ruin of Babylon and says that "satyrs shall dance" in her waste places.³ The word translated "satyr" is the same as that translated "he-goat" in the other passage. The satyrs were fabulous monsters of antiquity with the head of a man and goat's feet. Worship was offered to demons who were supposed to appear in goat-like form.⁴

A very clear case of animal worship in the eighth century is given by the writer of II Kings, who says that Hezekiah "brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it."⁵ It is impossible to say with certainty what this serpent-god really meant, or what its origin was. Modern scholars

¹ xvii, 7; ² xi, 15; ³ xiii, 21;

⁴ It should be remembered, however, that in many cases this idolatrous worship was offered to foreign gods, and cannot be taken as evidence that animal worship was part of Hebrew primitive religion; ⁵ xviii 4.

would incline to the view that it was a survival of a very primitive serpent worship. "The idol was the image of a serpent-god, so old that its origin was forgotten, and popular imagination would attribute it to Moses himself."¹ The serpent among many Eastern peoples was regarded as possessed of supernatural power. In the story of the Fall in Genesis it speaks, and has knowledge of God's secrets.

Enough has been said to show that there was a primitive religion which lived on for centuries among the mass of the people, and was connected with various superstitions or immoral usages. The purer Hebrew faith, which came to the nation through its religious leaders, to some extent utilized this primitive material as the vehicle of loftier ideas. The old framework was filled with new meaning. But it was only gradually that the purer religion made its way. The chief agents in this higher educative process were the prophets; and they were engaged in a constant struggle with crude forms of faith. It was their great task to show that the ritual and ceremonial elements in religion were not the important ones. They insisted on character bearing its fruits in conduct, on the ethical content of religion, on

¹ Pace, *op. cit.* p. 61.

God as a Being of perfect moral goodness, who required morality in His worshippers. So wonderful was their achievement, so sublime the conception of God which they finally reached, so immeasurably superior to anything in other contemporary faiths, that we are forced to postulate a special cause to explain this achievement. We call it revelation, and we speak of the prophets—and indeed of all the Biblical writers—as inspired ; meaning by that term that they were in some way specially taught by God.

Let us end this chapter by thinking for a few minutes about Inspiration—a term which the Church has wisely never tried to define. Inspiration literally means “ in-breathing,” and is a term applicable to the writers of the Bible, not to the record they wrote, though we, following the Bible itself, do commonly speak of the inspired books. But, strictly speaking, it is the writers who were inspired, not the books.

Now, as we all know, an immense change has come over our views of the nature and range of inspiration in the last eighty years. Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers believed, if not in Verbal Inspiration, at any rate in what was called Plenary Inspiration ; and

held that the Bible was free from any material error. Van Mildert, the learned Bishop of Durham, wrote in his Bampton Lectures (1814) that in the Bible "it is impossible even to imagine a failure, either in judgment or in integrity"; and argued that the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel was brought about to prevent the association of true believers with idolaters, and that the mark set on Cain was "probably some miraculous change in his external appearance, transmitted to his posterity, and serving as a memorial of the first apostasy from true religion."¹ In other words, the divine control of the writers was such that they were preserved from making any mistakes; what they said about the origins of the world and of human arts and civilization was absolutely correct. That view of the Bible still largely obtains among unreflective people, or among those who have made up their minds in advance as to the manner in which a revelation from God must be given. But that view cannot maintain itself in the light of modern knowledge, and will in course of time disappear. We know that the accounts of creation in Genesis cannot be reconciled with modern science, which is God's gift to us.

¹ Boyle Lectures 1802-5, Sermon xxi. 11.

We know from the study of philology and anthropology that the differences in human speech did not come about through any such method as the story of the Tower of Babel assumes. We know that there was no such Flood covering the whole earth as the Genesis story assumes. If the tops of the highest mountains had been covered, there would have been a depth of four to five miles of water over the globe. Where could that have come from? Where could it have gone, when the rain stopped? Flood stories are common in many parts of the world. It is very natural that it should be so, seeing how primitive man must have suffered from these inundations. Flood stories are traditions of local inundations. The Genesis story reflects the tradition of such a flood in the Euphrates and Tigris valleys.

We realize now that (i) the Bible does not come to teach us science, but religion; (ii) that in secular matters its writers had no more knowledge than any of their contemporaries; and that as to what happened "in the beginning" they knew nothing; (iii) that the Bible is a national literature covering a long period, and contains, as do all national literatures, elements of legend, and myth, and the floating traditions about a remote past which

are common to all nations. In a word, we have come to see that there is a large human element in the Bible, against which the divine element shines out all the more clearly.

The interesting thing is to trace out how the more rigid view of the inspiration of the Bible writers arose. Very few people ever ask themselves, where did this belief in plenary inspiration originate? They were taught it by their parents; who in turn received it from an earlier generation. When they came to years of discretion their minds were already full of a preconceived notion about the Bible and Inspiration. The following is a very brief summary of the history of belief in the Bible as an inspired record.

1. The Christian Church took over from the Jews their Old Testament, the Canon of which (i.e. the list of official scriptures) was gradually formed after considerable discussion and debate. Now the Jew had an extraordinary veneration for the written word. His belief in the inspiration of his Scriptures was so strict that it amounted virtually to a belief in verbal inspiration. The Christian Church received from the Jews the Canon of the Old Testament with the prestige attaching to it.

2. Gradually as there grew up a mass of

Christian literature, the Canon of the New Testament was formed, again not without much debate as to whether certain books should be included or excluded. The main principle which governed the selection was whether any book had apostolic authority ; but the secondary principle of its widespread reception by the local churches was also admitted.

3. Now directly the two Canons of Scripture were in existence we can see what prestige would attach to them. Here were the official scriptures, which had received the imprimatur of the Church, whose leaders, it was felt, had surely been guided by the Holy Spirit in making their selection. To the Canon of the New Testament was carried over the strict view of inspiration which belonged to the Canon of the Old Testament. There can be no doubt that in the main a very high view of inspiration was accepted by the early Christian Church. But there were always thinkers who took a more liberal view ; and it is interesting to note that such a famous man as Clement of Alexandria quite frankly confesses to the allegorical character of the early narratives of Genesis.¹

¹ See Sanday's Bampton Lectures, *Inspiration*, 1893, (Longmans), the sub-title of which is "The Early History and Origin of the Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration."

4. At the Reformation, when a revolt took place against the authority of Rome, the authority of the Bible received new emphasis in the Protestant Churches ; but it is sometimes forgotten that Calvin and Luther were, according to their lights, what we to-day should call "higher critics." Luther in particular recognized degrees of inspiration in the Biblical writers, and was very free in his criticism of portions of the Bible.

5. It was in the seventeenth century that doctrines of Verbal or Plenary Inspiration took root in the Reformed Churches of the West. The Bible was being violently attacked by the Romanists on the one side and the rationalists on the other, and in meeting these attacks the Protestant theologians developed extravagantly rigid views of inspiration, claiming for the Bible something which it never claims for itself. This rigid view of inspiration was almost universally accepted in England ; and naturally trouble arose when scholars began to suggest that there was a human element in the Bible, and that its contents were not all on the same level of inspiration.

The true method of discovering the nature of inspiration is to come to the Bible without (so far as that is possible) presuppositions as to

the way in which God must give a revelation. Let it speak for itself ; tell its own story. Let it be studied as any other literature is studied with all the best methods of research. And then let the question be answered : What do we mean when we call its writers inspired ?

What will be the story the Bible will tell ? It will be the story of light gradually conquering the darkness ; of a special people brought by a succession of teachers to an idea of God without parallel among contemporary nations, and so rich and living that it forms the basis of our modern theism. It will be the story of teachers who somehow were enabled to utilize their national traditions so as to convey striking moral lessons ; and to interpret the events of their past history in the light of God's guidance of the nation. Once again, it will be the story of writers, who tried to put down in words the extraordinary spiritual experience which had come to them ; and who so succeeded, that their words live on after all these centuries and find a responsive echo in our hearts. There lies the inspiration of the Bible writers—in the message they give, in its spiritual quality, its illuminative power, its capacity to meet the soul's deepest needs. Nothing that criticism has said, or can say, touches that. And that

spiritual quality, that religious and moral achievement of these writers, shines out all the more clearly when seen against the varied human background of the literature.

So long as man remains man with his need for God, his ideals, his conscience, his sense of sin, his longing for redemption, so long will the Bible prove itself to be the Word of God, His utterance to humanity, the gracious revelation of His divine purpose for the world.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORK OF MOSES

There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. DEUT. xxxiv. 10.

THE subject of this chapter is the place of Moses in the development of the Hebrew idea of God. Some attempt, however tentative, must be made to estimate his contribution to the religious life and thought of his people.

Let us face at once the fact that in dealing with Moses we have not yet reached the region of history proper. We are confronted with tradition coming down from a distant past. The documents which tell of Moses are not contemporary narratives. Our earliest written records in the Old Testament date from the ninth or eighth centuries. Possibly they embody still earlier records, but scholarship has not been able to disentangle these. The records as we have them now reflect to a considerable extent the outlook of the centuries in which they were composed. Hence we have to make large allowance for the transference to a much earlier time of ideas current when the

records were written. No charge of fraud or dishonesty can be brought against the writers for doing this. We have to remember what was the purpose of these historians. They were religious historians, who wrote in a religious interest. Was it not very natural that they, writing at a time when the conception of scientific history was non-existent, and writing about the spiritual experience of their race, and wishing to show that God was of such and such a character, should put back into the past the conception of God which meant so much to themselves? They were doing much the same kind of thing which a preacher to-day on Good Friday does, when he interprets Isaiah liii. in the light of the Passion of our Lord. After all, if a richer idea of God grew out of a simpler and more primitive idea the richer idea was latent in the simpler idea all the while.

We have to give due weight to the following considerations :

(a) Except in Ezekiel xl.-xlviii., which represents a special and late stage in the development of Israel's religion, the Old Testament throughout regards Moses as the originator of the forms and ceremonies of the worship of Yahweh. If the forms of worship were

considered to be older than Moses, then he is depicted as giving them a fresh impetus. We know that, as in the case of other nations, the religion of Israel developed gradually through several centuries; and that what is called "The Law of Moses" represents successive stages of codification. But would there have been this consistent tradition about Moses as the creator of Israel's religious forms, and that in an Eastern nation where traditional beliefs were carefully conserved, if the tradition had had no valid foundation in fact? Surely we may reasonably assume that Moses was a creative religious genius who did give a marked impress to the national religion.

(b) Secondly, consider the great religions of the world, Buddhism, Confucianism, Moham-medanism, Christianity. All spring from personal founders. There are other religions in which the creative personality is not so prominent; and in many of these, as the late Dr. Fairbairn pointed out in his book, *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, it will be found that the religion lacks any true conception of personality in God. God is regarded as the immanent life-principle animating the universe; and human personality suffers eclipse. But where the transcendent element in God is

emphasized, there, as a rule, a creative founder of the religion exists. Of course in Buddhism the transcendent element is lacking. It is not *always* true, either that religions with personal founders emphasize divine transcendence, or that religions which lack the conception of divine transcendence have no personal founders. The Hebrew conception of God emphasized (indeed grew in later Judaism to over-emphasize) the divine transcendence. And the growth of the religion was so remarkable, and followed so consistently one main line of advance, that the facts seem to require a personal founder at the source.

(c) Thirdly, the tradition connects Moses with the first stages of the growth of the national life. Under the Pharaohs the Israelites were not a nation, but a horde of slaves. The escape from Egypt, and the welding of the tribes into a whole under the sanction of religion, demands the presence of a leader, who had vision enough for so difficult a task, and a personality sufficiently strong to impress itself upon those under him. Historically as well as religiously the creative personality is required.

We may start, then, by assuming that Moses was a real person, who did a political work in inspiring the Hebrews with the beginnings of that consciousness of nationhood which became

such a marked characteristic of the nation ; who did a greater religious work in either creating, or giving a new direction to a conception of God, which was to unfold progressively its richness in the succeeding centuries. If a Personal God exists, and if it is His nature to reveal Himself, we should antecedently expect that He would carry out His purposes through human persons. If the Christian story is true, and God Himself took human personality as the medium of His completest self-revelation, that one fact justifies us in believing that at special creative moments in history He called or selected for a special task, a Moses here, a Paul there, and by His indwelling Spirit showed them a deeper vision of Himself and His purposes.

Coming now to closer quarters with the problem of the achievement of Moses, we have to ask, first of all, whether Moses was the originator of Yahweh-worship, or whether he only revived and reinforced an older faith. The question cannot be answered with any certainty. We have a twofold literary record, and there is a discrepancy between the accounts.¹ The document known as " J " gives

¹ The Book of Exodus is made up of various documents. Modern scholars are in general agreement that the two oldest sources of the book are the documents known as " J " and " E." " J " is

to God from the first the name Yahweh. The name occurs in the second narrative of the Creation in Genesis ii, 4 ff. This writer assumes that Yahweh was known to the ancestors of the Hebrew race and was worshipped by them. In those portions of the narrative in Exodus which belong to "E," it is distinctly stated that the revelation given to Moses at the burning bush was a revelation from the "God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."² Moses is here represented as introducing the people, not to any new and unknown God, but to the God worshipped by their forefathers. On the other hand God is revealed under a new name, the

so called because the writer uses almost exclusively the name JEHOVAH, while the writer of "E" prefers the name ELOHIM ("God.") "J" was probably written in Judah in the ninth century B.C. "E" is probably rather later in date, and came from the Northern Kingdom. Portions of these two sources were combined, probably early in the seventh century B.C. to form a continuous narrative. In addition, there is the source called "P" because it is dominated by priestly interests. It is the work of a priestly school, but probably does not all belong to the same period. "It is probable that "P" was written, partly during the Babylonian exile, partly during the century that followed the return to Judah. The materials upon which it was based were partly, it seems, historical traditions current in priestly circles, partly the knowledge of pre-exilic Temple usage possessed at the time, the whole of the latter being arranged, developed, and systematized so as to form an *ideal picture* of the theocracy, as it was supposed to have existed in the Mosaic age. A second compiler or redactor (RP), living in the fifth or fourth century B.C., taking "P" as the framework of his narrative, inserted into it large portions of JE, and so, except perhaps for a very few still later additions (e.g. xxxviii. 21-31) produced *Exodus*—not of course as an isolated book, but as part of the Hexateuch—in its present shape." (Driver's *Exodus*, in Cambridge Bible, Intro., p. xii.); ² iii. 6.

name of Yahweh. The writer of "E" assumes that the patriarchs were not familiar with the name Yahweh. Similarly "P" states: "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty,¹ but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them."² But "P" agrees with "E" that, though the *name* Yahweh was new, the God who revealed himself to Moses was the God whom the patriarchs had worshipped. So that there is a general agreement in all the records that it was not a completely new religion which Moses taught the Israelites. Reflection surely confirms this; because it is unlikely, to say the least, that Moses would have succeeded in making, as he clearly did, a successful appeal to the tribes for unity, an appeal based on religion, if he had been giving them an entirely new idea of God, and introducing them for the first time to a strange deity. We may argue, then, that what Moses did was to give a new colour to an older religion, to re-vitalize it, and above all to present God to the people under a new character. "Name" in the Bible stands for character. The new name is the expression of a new aspect of the divine personality and purpose.

¹ El Shaddai; ² vi. 3.

When we ask what was the nature of the religion which was practised by the Israelite tribes before Moses came upon the scene, we are left to the region of conjecture, just as we are when we ask what was the religion of Abraham. But one or two things may be affirmed with a fair measure of certainty. First, this primitive religion was connected with a belief that God dwelt on the mountain called Horeb. We read in Exodus iii. 1, "Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb." It was at Horeb that the revelation was given to him. Secondly, this deity was worshipped by the Kenites, a branch of the Midianites. Jethro was a priest in Midian. Some have argued that Moses, during his stay with Jethro, when he had to fly from Egypt, learned the name "Yahweh" from the Kenites. But here the old difficulty occurs. Could Moses have so successfully united the Israelite clans if he had presented to them a Kenite God, a foreign God of whom they had not heard? The incident recorded in Exodus xviii. 12, when the Israelites after their escape from Egypt, were present at a sacrificial feast in Kenite territory, at

which Jethro officiated, is satisfactorily explained by the assumption that Jethro naturally took the lead in shewing religious hospitality to visitors to his own territory. Others have thought that Yahweh was the God worshipped by Moses' own tribe: "my father's God" He is called in the hymn of triumph ascribed to Moses after the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.¹ We have to admit that we do not know how either Moses or the Midianites came to worship Jahweh, or what their conception of God was. Whatever it was, Moses gave it a new significance.

Rudolf Otto's recent book *The Idea of the Holy* is devoted to an examination of what he calls the element of the "numinous" in religion. By the numinous he means that transcendent, non-rational element in religion, which is present both in the very beginnings of religion and in its most spiritual developments. The awareness of a Presence beyond us; the feeling of awe, majesty, terror; the recognition that some inscrutable power surrounds us—this is the kind of idea connected with the numinous. Otto maintains that, though we should try to rationalize our religious experience and to relate it to the rest of our experience, we shall

¹ Exodus xv. 2.

never succeed in doing so. There will be a numinous element which always eludes us. Otto's view of religion should be accepted with caution, because, though he does good service in calling attention to the transcendent element in religion, and reminds us that worship is a real part of religion, he tends to find the essence of religion in this non-rational element. And that opens the door to superstition. Any religious ceremony which creates the emotions of awe and wonder, any rite which fosters mystery may thus be justified. The emphasis is put on the irrational factor; just where it should not be put for those who are bidden to serve God with their minds and to have reasons for the faith which is in them.

Otto has been mentioned because there was clearly a numinous element in the Mosaic worship of Yahweh and probably in the more primitive faith which preceded it. It looks as if Yahweh worship grew out of the worship of a Nature God, or Storm God. We read when the Israelites camped before the mount that "there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud."¹ What more natural than that the primitive mind, impressed by

¹ Exodus xix. 16.

the thunderstorm and the forces of nature, should make the lofty peak of a mountain, and its dim, recessed caves, the habitation of the Unknown Power which evoked its worship? In such a religion the transcendent element was present.

Now suppose that Moses, inspired by a new vision of God, did two things, (*a*) first, gave a richer ethical meaning to this primitive religion, and conceived of God, however dimly, as a God of moral character; (*b*) and then, secondly, linked this God more closely with the special fortunes of the Israelite clans, have you not here just the initial transformation of a primitive natural religion, which would provide the starting-point for the future growth of the religion, which we know took place?

That, at any rate, seems to be the most reasonable hypothesis which we can form. Of course it is a hypothesis: we are not in a position to know with certainty what Moses did. But we have to establish some continuity between the conception of God presented in the documents which deal with Moses and the origins of Yahweh worship. These documents unquestionably present God as a God both of moral character and purpose. That twofold conception of God must have come from

somewhere. Some human mind, taught by God, must have framed it. Why should not that mind have been the mind of Moses? The great leader is always in advance of his contemporaries; and religious genius is often "born out of due time." Nor can you dictate to God the measure of inspiration which He shall give to those whom in any age He calls to His service.

In the Mosaic conception of God two points stand out clearly. God is thought of as a God of purpose; and is presented as a Being of moral character. Let us consider each point in turn.

1. In connection with the first point, the purposiveness of God, we have to study the revelation recorded as being given to Moses at the Burning Bush. Called to the great task of freeing his people, Moses hesitates. He sees (had he not long been brooding over the matter in the silences of the desert, when he kept Jethro's flock?) that the only bond which can unite these Israelite slaves and weld them into a nation, is the bond of religion. And so he asks: "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me, what is His

name? What shall I say to them?"¹ "What is his name? That is, what is God's character?" "How am I to present God to the people, so as to win their allegiance?" And the answer comes "I AM THAT I AM; and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Much has been written about the meaning of this word "Yahweh" and various explanations of it have been given. We need not now go into details. Suffice it here to say that while the idea of the self-subsistence and eternity of God may be legitimately read into the meaning of the word, the primary emphasis should be put rather on the conception of activity. Yahweh is not simply a Being who is, but one who acts, who unfolds His nature. The Hebrew mind was not metaphysical in cast, but eminently practical. And, though there is a metaphysic of the divine nature in the Old Testament, the point of view of the Hebrew writers was essentially that of men who were concerned with religion as a factor in human life. God's attitude to man, His purpose for man, were what interested them. Hence the truer rendering of the word would seem to be "I will be what I will be"; or "I will become

¹ iii. 13.

what I will become." That is how both Driver and Davidson interpret it. Driver says that it means "He will—not of course once only, but habitually—approve Himself." ¹ Davidson says: "It seems evident that in the view of the writer '*Ehyeh* and '*Yahweh* are the same: that God is '*Ehyeh*, "I will be," when speaking of Himself, and '*Yahweh*, "He will be," when spoken of by others. What He will be is left unexpressed—"He will be with them, helper, strengthener, deliverer." ²

In other words Moses is invited to trust God, is told that God will progressively reveal Himself, that time and a ripening experience will unfold depth upon depth of character in God; that God has a growing purpose in store for this nation, that He is a God of self-revelation who has many things to say to them, but they cannot bear them now. Surely that was a thought of God which would help Moses and be a source of inspiration to the people. Was it not just what they needed? Before them lay the venture of the Great Unknown. They were to make a new start. What was ahead of them they knew not; but if they could rise to the assurance that God was calling them to

¹ *Exodus*, in Cambridge Bible—note p. 40.

² Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, II., p. 199.

this venture, if they could feel that He could be trusted, if they could expect that He who was with them in their flight from Egypt would be with them still amid the sands of the desert, then they could go forward with courage.

Across all the centuries of Israel's history is written in letters of gold these words, "I will be what I will be." What was the contribution which Israel made to the world's thought and civilization? It was the contribution of a religious experience which had no parallel in other nations. At the basis of that experience lay a conception of God and of a divine purpose, which grew richer and clearer as time went on. We see in the Old Testament the unfolding of a germ into a mature spiritual organism, which itself points forward to future growth. We see the majestic march of a thought of God which culminates in the ethical monotheism of the prophets. We see, here if anywhere in history, the evolution of a great design. We come in contact with the Living God, who "by divers portions and in divers manners" spake through the Spirit to the religious leaders of their race, and stage by stage, led them on to a truer conception of Himself; and then in the fullness of the times

crowned this progressive earlier revelation by the coming of Jesus Christ. Surely the subsequent history of Israel demands that Moses, however dimly, should have had an idea of God, which lifted Him above the level of Nature deities, and set Him within the circle of conceptions such as those of providence, guidance, purpose, self-manifestation, nearness to men. As has been already said, if continuity is characteristic of the divine activity, then in the germ we are right in finding the promise of the full-grown organism. Faith—not unreasoning credulity, but the reasonable conviction which takes the widest possible survey of the facts—faith divines God's immanent and growing purpose.

“ She spies the summer through the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
She hears the lark within the songless egg.”

2. Let us consider now the second point whether there is any evidence that Moses interpreted God as a Being of moral character. Was part of his work to establish a moral code for the nation? Here we are at once confronted with the problem of the origin of the Ten Commandments, a problem upon which it is impossible to reach any absolutely certain

conclusions. The following, however, would seem to be the reasonable probabilities of the case.

We have a double version of the Decalogue ; one in Exodus, one in Deuteronomy.¹ In both we notice at once that, while the first, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth Commandments are given in short, terse forms ("Thou shalt do no murder ; neither shalt thou steal"), the other Commandments have additional matter, which consists of reasons for obeying the Commandments. The version in Deuteronomy is considerably later than that in Exodus. When we compare the two, we see that the additional matter just referred to is not exactly the same in the two versions. For instance, a different reason for keeping the Sabbath is given in Deuteronomy from the reason given in Exodus. It is also clear from examination of the style of this additional matter that in both books it is in the main Deuteronomic ; that is, it comes from the school of writers who, somewhere about 720-621 B.C., produced the book of Deuteronomy, and re-edited the earlier documents. There is no question that the

¹ Exodus xx. Deuteronomy v. My immediate predecessor in this lectureship took as his subject the Decalogue. For a full treatment cp. *The Decalogue* by R. H. Charles, Archdeacon of Westminster.

Book of the Law found in the Temple in Josiah's reign and published 621 B.C. is the Book of Deuteronomy (not the whole of it, but a large part of it). It was composed sometime in the century before its publication.¹ It is plain, therefore, that the Commandments, as we have them now, represent a gradual growth. They cannot have come in their present form from Moses. The real problem is, whether any of them came from Moses? The main facts to be taken into consideration in approaching this problem are these :

(a) The Second Commandment raises serious difficulties. If Moses forbade the making of graven images, why was it that no one till the eighth century B.C. was aware of the fact? It was the general practice to employ images in the worship of Yahweh up to the reign of Jeroboam II. It was not till then that the prophets began to condemn the practice. We can hardly hold that this Commandment at any rate was Mosaic.

(b) In Deuteronomy the Decalogue is made the basis of the covenant established at Horeb between God and the nation. But in Exodus there is no mention of the Ten Commandments in connection with the covenant. On the

¹ II Kings xxii. 8.

contrary, the latter has as its basis quite other laws. And if we study the earliest documents in Exodus known as "J" and "E," no room for the Decalogue can be found in them. The evidence, therefore, seems to point to the Decalogue being a later addition. It is suggested that it came into being somewhere between 750 and 650 B.C., shortly before the rise of the Deuteronomic school of writers.

(c) Thirdly, if we compare the Ten Commandments with the other legislation attributed in Exodus to Moses, we shall find that the form of this other legislation is less general, and more concrete and particular. Thus while the Decalogue says: "Thou shalt not steal," the parallel law in Exodus is: "If a man steal an ox or a sheep, and kill it or sell it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep."¹ And so on with the other injunctions. The more generalized form is almost certainly later. Moral codes in quite primitive times consisted of certain specified and detailed customary injunctions.

(d) Lastly (and this is an argument in favour of the Mosaic origin of at least some of the Ten Commandments) we must be careful not to read into the Commandments as originally

¹ xxii. 1,

given our modern full ethical meaning. None of them, as Kautzsch has pointed out, need necessarily be regarded as teaching morals. All can be interpreted as insisting on the preservation of rights. Only in the Tenth Commandment about coveting do we reach what seems to be a higher ethical standard.

We cannot say more than this on the question of the Decalogue as a whole, as the possible work of Moses. (a) Tradition in the Old Testament uniformly speaks of Moses as the fountain-head of Israel's law both moral and ceremonial. That he enacted some legislation is reasonably certain. That—apart from the Decalogue—that legislation was partly ethical in colour is also clear; if we grant that any legislation at all came from him. While the Decalogue, as we have it now, represents a growth, there is (apart from the Second Commandment) nothing in it which necessarily represents an ethical standard beyond that which Moses might have reached.¹ But whether the germinal form of the Ten Commandments is to be attributed to him or not, surely we must hold that he gave to the conception of God some ethical colour. Custom, it is true, is

¹ cp. Kautzsch's article, "The Religion of Israel," in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, V., pp. 632-34.

the cradle from which morality is born. Tribal customs give rise to ethical codes. But custom itself requires explanation. Can that explanation be found merely in the preservation of rights? Must not the custom which ultimately becomes the moral code be linked from the first with religion? The religious development of a tribe goes hand in hand with its moral development. If Moses was telling the people of a God who cared for them and had a special purpose for them, surely he would have related his moral and ceremonial precepts to the character of that God. It was his purpose (so we judge) to re-vitalize the idea of God. More was wanted to make the idea of God effective, to make it a living power in the national life, than an insistence on His transcendent Majesty. God had to be brought into relation to conscience and duty. It had to be shown that God had character as well as power. That could be best done by telling the people in quite simple ways that the elementary customary rules of right and wrong were of real concern to the God who was taking this nation under His care.

One other matter remains to be considered briefly—the *Covenant* made with God at Horeb. The idea that Israel stood in covenant relation-

ship with God is one of the root ideas of the Old Testament. The formation of a covenant is projected back to the time of Abraham. The word used for "covenant" has various shades of meaning; but in the case of the covenant at Horeb we may regard it as a compact undertaken both by man and God; only the initiative lies with God; because He it is who freely chooses Israel. The sign and seal of the covenant was the life-blood of a sacrificial victim. We read: "And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.'"¹ God and the nation were thus bound together in the closest union. We are moving here in a region of very ancient and primitive ideas, and because this notion of blood covenantship is so ancient and so widespread we may feel that we have good grounds for maintaining that our records here are based on fact. Among these primitive ideas was the belief that the God partook of the blood and shared in the sacrificial feast. But the Horeb covenant is more than a sacramental act of communion. The idea of mutual obligation enters into it. The people pledge themselves

¹ Exodus xxiv. 8.

to obey the commands which Moses gives in the name of Yahweh. Yahweh in turn undertakes to protect and help the people.

There is no reason why we should not hold that Moses did actually make some definite covenant with God on behalf of the people. It was what we should expect him to do. Having successfully led the clans out of Egypt, having welded them into one in the name of religion, having brought them to the sacred mountain, which some at any rate of the clans had previously regarded as the abode of deity, would not the next step be to cement the new-born unity by a solemn covenant with the God who had already proved that He could be trusted by effecting this deliverance?

What precisely was the content of the covenant we cannot say. Regulations for worship must have been made; and some ethical rules must have been laid down. Is not the conception of an obligation to worship in a particular manner implicitly ethical? Does not the idea of a protecting and guiding deity, whose favour has to be won by obedience, involve at least the germs of moral conduct? It is true that the development of religion is everywhere marked by the growing predominance of the moral element over that of the ritual

and ceremonial element ; but we have no sure ground for saying that the most primitive ritual was devoid of all ethical significance. We may assume then that Moses did provide some elementary moral teaching for the Israelites, which gave an impulse in the ethical direction to Hebrew religion.

By way of conclusion and summary the following points may be emphasized (*a*) History is not simply a matter of the interaction of great natural forces ; it is the field in which creative personalities appear, do their work, change the current of events. Tendencies owe their origin and direction to human beings, who are more than mere sluices, through which flow tides they cannot control. The Old Testament, which in the prophets provides us with our earliest philosophy of history, is simply alive with the sense of personality. It is true that the sense of the value of human personality is a little dim at first, and does not develop till the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel ; but the Personality of God is stamped on every page. And God is represented as respecting human personality. The Lord, says our text, "knew Moses face to face." God in the Old Testament has a great purpose which He is carrying out through a particular nation, and

pre-eminently through the leaders of that nation ; but not only through the great men, but through all who will yield themselves to His guidance and inspiration. The purpose of God in the Bible is concerned with the production and development of personality. Will any lesser thought of God satisfy us ? If the long process of evolution has climbed to the production of human personality, must not the meaning of the process be found in the end reached ? Now is there anything unreasonable in the thought that God selects special men for special purposes ; or in the thought that a deeper spiritual vision may be granted to a special man ? In the field of personality there is no dead level of uniformity ; nor is there any one mould in which God's activity must flow. If the subsequent development of Israel's religion seems to require a creative leader at the origin, a philosophy which gives primacy to spirit can raise no objection ; while religion simply says : " If God can illuminate a man now, He could have illuminated a man then."

(b) And from the story of Moses—one-third history let us say, and two-thirds dim tradition—we may learn another lesson, which will serve us in good stead throughout our study of the Old Testament as we come face to face

with the ideas of revelation and inspiration ; the lesson that God is like the householder of the parable who brings out of his treasury things new and old. The story of Moses teaches us that old forms can be made, under the Spirit of God, to yield a new meaning.

An old conception of a tribal God blossoms into that of a national God. A Nature Deity with His seat in a mountain, becomes a God of character. He may still be worshipped under the old forms ; but the forms win a new content. Moral goodness and purpose begin to appear through the smoke of Horeb. The " Mountain Gloom " begins to change into the " Mountain Glory." That is ever God's method, the method of progressive revelation. Of course, there comes a time when the old form can no longer contain the new meaning. The ferment of the new grape bursts the old wine-skins. But then the Spirit creates new and better forms. Thus God leads us from truth to richer truth. Himself unchanging, the " I am," He bids us trust Him, as He reveals Himself the " I will be."

CHAPTER VII

THE PRE-PROPHETIC PERIOD

The Holy One of Israel. ISAIAH v. 24.

IN studying any process of growth we are always confronted by the puzzle how to explain the greater richness of the later stages. In one sense there is obviously more in the end than there was in the beginning ; the oak tree is more than the acorn. Yet the acorn must contain the potentialities which develop into the oak tree. Potentiality is one of those convenient terms which conceal our ignorance. We do not know the secret of a living growth. Neither can we say how God's Spirit acted upon the religious teachers of Israel. All that we see is a religion growing from primitive stages, which resembles what we find in the primitive faiths of other nations, up to an ethical monotheism which has no parallel elsewhere. In order to explain this remarkable development we postulate a special action of God upon the Hebrew race ; but we remind ourselves that God's free spiritual activity is under no compulsion to adopt the method of

“line upon line, precept upon precept,” and that God may have given to a man like Moses

As he lay with his flocks in the night
On the starlit Arabian waste

a deeper revelation of Himself as to one “born out of due time.” “The wind bloweth where it listeth . . . so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

We pass on now to consider religion in Israel in the period between Moses and Amos, the earliest of the writing prophets. The period covers the gradual settlement in Canaan and the early monarchy. The literary material at our disposal for this period is the Book of Judges, which embodies a collection of stories of Israel's heroes made after the settlement, probably somewhere about 700 B.C.; parts of the Books of Samuel and Kings, notably the early Saul and David narrative, and a special section (chh. 9–20) in II Samuel; and the narratives of Elijah and Elisha. In addition we have the Book of Joshua, linked now by scholars with the first five books of the Old Testament, the whole being called the Hexateuch. What concerns us here is that double strand of narrative in the Hexateuch known as the “JE” documents; which are the work

of a prophetic school of writers, and are to be dated somewhere between 850 and 750 B.C. Throughout these writings we find that the same general point of view is adopted. Here, again, of course, you have to allow for the religious ideas of a later age being reflected back upon an earlier age ; but there is evidence that in the narratives as we now have them older material, and written material, is incorporated. Incorporated too is tradition coming down from an earlier time. So that we are not left so much to conjecture as we were in the case of the Mosaic religion. We may feel more sure that we have in these sources a reliable picture of some of the main features of Israel's religion in the pre-prophetic period.

What, then, was the conception of God in this period ? Here the first problem which presents itself is whether a monotheistic conception of God became established ? Did Israel believe in one God, or in many gods ? Let us take two or three passages and see what conclusions we may draw from them. In Judges we read how Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, who were warring against Israel, telling the king that Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given his people the land of Canaan, and that they could not give back

the territory which Yahweh had given them. "So now the Lord, the God of Israel, hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess them?" And then follows this question: "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy God giveth thee to possess?"¹ It appears as if Jephthah recognised the existence of Chemosh. He was the national God of Ammon, as Yahweh was the national God of Israel. Each God championed the cause of his own people.

David, who was a fugitive from Saul's anger, says that his enemies have driven him out of the land which was the home of his people, and under the special protection of Yahweh; "they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods."² The natural inference seems to be that other lands were under the protection of other gods; and that anyone who was banished from Canaan was cut off from the worship of Yahweh, the national God.

This conception of a national God, whose domain was a particular territory, is illustrated by the story of Naaman. Naaman after his

¹ xi. 23, 24; ² I Samuel xxvi. 19.

cure resolves to be a worshipper of Yahweh ; but how can he worship Him outside His own territory ? The difficulty is solved by Naaman taking back with him to Syria two mules' burden of earth from Israelite soil, so that he may erect an altar on ground which belongs to Yahweh.¹ We are told that Solomon built at Jerusalem a high place "for Chemosh the abomination of Moab."² The historian condemns the king for this act of disloyalty ; but the probable explanation is that he built the high place, in order that one of his Moabite wives might be able to worship her national god Chemosh in a foreign land.

Now Professor A. B. Davidson, an Old Testament theologian whose judgment all must respect, denies that these examples prove that the existence of other gods was admitted by the leaders of Israelite religion. What, he asks, could Jephthah have done in speaking to a worshipper of Chemosh but assume for the purpose of argument that Chemosh existed ? Might not a Christian to-day say to a Hindu, "you had better ask Shiva to grant you this blessing ? " Similarly, when David complained that his enemies were driving him away from the land of Yahweh, saying " Go, serve other

¹ II Kings v. 17 ; ² I Kings xi. 7.

gods," there is no evidence that it was believed that these other gods had any reality.¹ It is doubtful whether Professor Davidson's argument holds good. He concedes that it might have been believed that Yahweh was the God of Israel alone and could not have been found outside Israelite territory. But if so, were foreign lands under no divine rule? Surely the Hebrew, with his vivid consciousness that his own country was under the protection of Yahweh, would have been more likely to believe in the real existence of other national gods, than to believe that Yahweh alone existed. He came to believe in the sole existence of Yahweh, and this monotheism was implicit in his faith from the first; but it only gradually became explicit. It is more likely that at this period in Israel's history the prevailing creed was what is called Henotheism. Israel had one God, and was allowed to worship only that one God; but other nations had their gods, who were regarded as real.

But all the while we have to remember that Israel's conception of Yahweh was pregnant with seeds of development. It contained far more than the thought of a national god. We have seen that there is no good reason to doubt

¹ *The Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 60-64, 93.

that Moses presented Yahweh to the nation as a god of moral character. Now the moment you concede moral character to God you are on the road to monotheism ; for moral goodness transcends all local distinctions and is inherently universal in scope. Humanity is a whole because men possess a common mind and a common moral nature ; and reflection shows that these things must be derived from a common source. It is interesting, too, to note that none of our sources limits the power of Yahweh to the land of Israel. Yahweh called Abraham when he was in Ur of the Chaldees, and is with him in Egypt. He brings forth the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage ; and Jethro the priest of Midian says : “ Now know I that Yahweh is greater than all gods.” ¹ It is clear, then, that in the period 850–750 B.C. when the JE documents were put together, there was a conception of Yahweh as something more than a national God ; and we may well believe that in the earlier period, though He was regarded primarily as the nation’s deity, He was conceived as possessed of power and qualities which raised Him far above the gods of the surrounding nations. Monotheism is always there under the surface. Like some winged insect which has

¹ Exodus xviii. 11.

just come out of its chrysalis and poises itself trembling on a twig before it stretches its wings for flight, so the belief in God, One, Supreme, Moral, is always struggling to reveal itself as the dominant element in Israel's faith.

The revelation of Yahweh as the God of Israel shows itself in three ways prophetic of the monotheism which was its final outcome. (a) There is, first, as has been said, the moral element in Yahweh's character, which, as its import is more clearly conceived, is bound to lead to an acknowledgment of God's sole sovereignty. (b) There is the thought of Yahweh as the leader in war of the hosts of Israel. The "Lord of Hosts" is the name given to Him. He was conceived originally as the War-God: thus David says to Goliath, "I come to thee in the name of Yahweh of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel."¹ Under His leadership the tribes of Israel became conscious of their unity. He is their God and they are His people. The sacred Ark is His symbol, and His dwelling place. Victory is His gift. He leads the people into Canaan and subdues their enemies. The effect upon the conception of God of the conquest of the

¹ I Samuel xvii. 45.

Canaanites must have been to enhance the thought of Yahweh's power, and to show that other national gods were not to be compared to Him. All this was making for monotheism ; and hence it is not surprising when we find in the prophets the title " Lord of Hosts " obtaining a wider significance, and gathering to itself ideas of supramundane might and glory, so that He is conceived as the Ruler of the universe, and the Creator and Marshaller of the hosts of heaven. (c) Thirdly, there is the constant thought of the providential care of God for Israel, which contains within itself the idea of a special purpose of God, for the carrying out of which Israel was to be the instrument. This purpose cannot fail. God secures its fulfilment despite opposition. As experience grew and reflection deepened, the sense of the divine purpose became stronger, until at a later stage it was seen in its full redemptive colours. Along this line also was religious thought moving to the conception of One God who controlled all human history.

The personal activity of God was emphasized in Hebrew religion. God acted in history as He acted personally in nature. The thunder was His voice ; the storm-cloud was His chariot. At a later stage the doctrine of the divine

transcendence was developed to such an extent that God was relegated to a distant heaven, and was conceived as acting upon human life through intermediaries. It is in this later period that belief in angels becomes prominent. But in the period with which we are now dealing, as in the period of prophecy which succeeded it, God was thought of as actively intervening in human affairs. One special form of this divine activity has now to be considered.

In the religion of Israel prophecy is the most remarkable feature, and the last five of these chapters will deal in the main with the prophetic conception of God. But Hebrew prophecy did not suddenly spring up as an entirely new phenomenon. It had its roots in a long past, and grew out of that past. What, then, were the materials out of which prophecy developed? (a) Magic and sorcery are found in all primitive religions, and they existed in the religion of Israel. Thus we read in Exodus of the use Moses made of his staff or magician's wand,¹ and of how Joseph practised the art of divining by means of liquid in a bowl,² and in Numbers of how rods were used for divination;³ all of which practices imply the belief that it was possible for men to enter into

¹ iv. 2-4; ² Genesis xlv. 5; ³ xvii. 6.

communication with God. And we find these practices continuing right down to the Exile, though the prophets protest against them. Here, for instance, is a passage in Isaiah: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto the wizards that chirp and mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? on behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead?"¹ This of course is a condemnation of necromancy, which the religion of Yahweh always forbade. But how widespread in the popular religion were these superstitious practices is shewn by such a verse as this in Jeremiah: "But as for you, hearken you not to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers."² (b) But we must seek for other sources for prophecy. One such is found in the presence of the person called a "seer." The title is first applied in the Old Testament to Samuel and it is explained that "he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer."³ What are the characteristics of the Seer? He is not primarily a man who foresees and can foretell the future, but one who, inspired or illuminated by God, can see what is hidden. He may, or may not,

¹ viii. 19; ² xxvii. 9; ³ I Samuel ix. 9.

be in a state of ecstasy. Balaam was probably in a state of ecstasy, for he describes himself as "the man whose eye was closed" (the outward eye); and the man "which heareth the words of God, and knoweth the knowledge of the Most High, which seeth the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and having his eyes open" (the inward eye).¹ Samuel the seer comes before us as the upholder of the worship of Yahweh, and the deliverer of the people. He tries to save the people from idolatry, and by prayer and sacrifice brings about the victory over the Philistines. In the oldest narrative he is consulted about the loss of Saul's asses; knows that Saul is to be king, anoints him privately, and tells him in advance of some experiences which are to happen to him.² (c) Besides the seers there is another class of persons, to whom the name "prophet" was given, though they are not prophets in the later sense of the word. These were people on whom at times came a frenzy or wild enthusiasm, which was attributed to the Spirit of God. Their enthusiasm was often increased by music. Samuel says this to Saul: "And it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a band of prophets coming down from the

¹ Numbers xxiv. 15, 16; ² I Samuel ix

high place with a psaltery, and a timbrel, and a pipe, and a harp, before them ; and they shall be prophesying : and the Spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.”¹ We read how Saul stripped off his clothes and lay in a frenzied state for a day and a night,² and we recall what has become a proverbial expression : “ Is Saul also among the prophets ? ” The figure of Elijah stands rather alone. He is nearer to the class of true prophet than he is to this class of enthusiasts. We shall have to speak of him shortly in another connection, and with his name will be coupled that of Nathan.

The Old Testament is just alive with the sense of the Living God. It views human life as a sphere in which God directly operates. It is emphatic in its assertion that God and man can come into living relationship. It pictures God as selecting men to be the recipients of power and illumination from Himself. It may be worth while here to say a word about the conception of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament ; taking our illustration mainly from the period under review in this chapter. God manifests Himself outwardly, and for these

¹ I Samuel x. 5, 6. ; ² I Samuel xix. 24.

outward manifestations the phrase "the Angel of the Lord" is used. But He also manifests Himself inwardly in men's hearts and minds by His Spirit.

Spirit is one of those rather vague words, which it is not easy to define; but when we think of ourselves as spirit the ideas which suggest themselves are these. Spirit is "for itself." It implies a centre of self-consciousness, a centre of self-subsistence. We regard a brick or a stone as a mere means to some other end; but a spirit is never a mere means to some other end. It exists for itself. Secondly, spirit is essentially creative and active. As spiritual beings we plan and carry out purposes. We use matter for various ends. We express ourselves through matter. We reveal ourselves in action and speech. Our spirits are ourselves. So in the Bible God's Spirit is God personally acting, revealing Himself; using human personality as the instrument through which He acts. God's Spirit comes upon men to illuminate them, or quicken them. Men are regarded as being in direct and immediate contact with the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God was the agent in creation. The Spirit moved upon the waters, that chaos of water which Hebrew cosmogony pictured as the pre-

existent material out of which God created the universe. The Spirit of God breathed the breath of life into man's nostrils. In the sphere of human life we find many mentions of the Spirit's activity in the Book of Judges. "And the spirit of the Lord came upon him (Othniel), and he judged Israel ; and he went out to war." ¹ "The spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon ; and he blew a trumpet ; and Abiezer was gathered together after him." ² Samson rent the lion in pieces because "the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him." ³ The enthusiasm of the early prophets was attributed to the action of the Spirit. The artistic skill of Bezalel (the shadow of God) is attributed to the Spirit : "I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass." ⁴

We to-day should not attribute to the Spirit of God many things which in those early days were so attributed. Our danger is that we may pay only lip service to the doctrine of the Spirit's operation in human lives. We speak of God as immanent, and many have interpreted divine immanence in a semi-pantheistic fashion,

¹ iii. 10 ; ² vi. 34 ; ³ xiv. 6 ; ⁴ Exodus xxxi. 3, 4.

losing sight of the counterbalancing doctrine of divine transcendence. But for a Christian the true meaning of divine immanence is that God is continually creative. His Spirit is at work everywhere, the highest field of His operation being human personality. Here, however, He is checked by human sin and indifference. God could do so much more with us, if we would allow Him. In moods of scepticism or weariness it is a refreshment to turn to the Bible, and to read of a people, not very much interested in speculative problems, with no metaphysical cast of mind, yet possessed of an intensely vivid realization of God's personal activity ; possessed of it, because they were experiencing it. What they say about the Spirit of God should help us to say with the Psalmist, "all my fresh springs are in thee." ¹

There are many points in connection with the idea of God in this period which we have no time to discuss, such for example as the use of images in connection with the worship of Yahweh, or the exact meaning of the phrase "the Angel of the Lord." All through the period, and indeed for long afterwards, very imperfect notions of God prevail, and in the popular religion there is much superstition

¹ Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

and much survival of the beliefs and practices of the earlier ethnic religion. But all the while there is the movement towards the purer ethical and monotheistic religion of the prophets. In this struggle the only point which can here be considered is the relation of the worship of Yahweh to Baal worship.

On entering Canaan Israel at once came into contact with the religion of the Canaanites, and unquestionably borrowed from them many of their practices. This, after all, was very natural; because, in the first place, though Yahweh was their God, they believed in the existence of other national gods and so would have believed in the existence of Baal, the Canaanite God. They were in Baal's land; was it not good policy to come to terms with him? In the second place, on entering Canaan Israel exchanged a nomadic life for a life of agriculture. The Canaanites were agriculturists and grew the vine. Baal was the giver of the fruits of the soil. Could they expect to be successful tillers of the land without Baal's help? What we see therefore is a double process (a) of accommodation of Yahweh worship to Baal worship (b) of struggle between the two religions, which ultimately results in the complete victory of the religion of Yahweh;

but, as so often happens, the conquered left their impress on the conquerors.

Of the influence of Baal worship in Israel there is no doubt. Take only two pieces of evidence. Hosea, writing in the eighth century, puts these words into Israel's mouth: "I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink . . . for she did not know that I gave her the corn and the wine and the oil, and multiplied unto her silver and gold, which they used for Baal."¹ If these practices existed in Hosea's day, must they not have been still more prevalent at an earlier time? Take again the employment of the name Baal in Israelite proper names, where Baal is the substitute for Yahweh. Thus we have Jerubbaal (Gideon's real name); Eshbaal, Meribaal, who were descendants of Saul. We actually find the name "Bealiah"—"Yahweh is Baal."² Baal is a title meaning "Lord," and so could easily be transferred to Yahweh; but the combination of the two names into one is interesting. We notice that in parts of the Book of Judges Baal worship is denounced as apostasy from Yahweh, the only true God. But this represents the view of the writer who was writing later.

¹ ii. 5, 8; ² I Chronicles xii. 5.

At the time about which he writes the worship of Yahweh had not completely triumphed. Baal was worshipped probably along with Yahweh by the Israelites, who, be it remembered were struggling for the possession of Canaan, a land under the rule of another god.

Why did the worship of Yahweh triumph? Kautzsch in his long and very interesting article on "The Religion of Israel" ¹ gives two main reasons. (a) First, there was the localizing of Yahweh in Canaan, especially at certain primitive sanctuaries. Horeb or Sinai was still perhaps regarded as His main abode; it was so, for instance, by Elijah. The Elijah narrative speaks of "Horeb, the mount of God" ²; but as the Canaanites were dispossessed some of their Baal shrines and sacred places became places of worship of Yahweh, who had proved himself the stronger god. And these new shrines were erected for Yahweh worship alone. Thus Gideon built an altar at Ophrah and called it "Jehovahshalom" ³; the ark was placed at Shiloh and then at Jerusalem, and finally Solomon built a splendid temple at Jerusalem. In this way, as Kautzsch says, Yahweh "becomes simply identified with Baal, steps into possession

¹ In Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*; ² I Kings xix. 8.

³ Judges vi. 24.

of all the property and functions of the latter.”
(*b*) But more important is the second reason ; the conception of Yahweh as a God enthroned in heaven. Such a God was obviously superior to all local deities and possessed supramundane powers. We have to allow for a reading back into earlier times of later conceptions ; but even so, there were from the first, as has been already pointed out, elements in Yahweh worship which implied that the national god of the Hebrews was not on the inferior level of a merely local or national deity. Yahweh from the first had character. Creation, providence, judgment were attributed to Him ; and all these involve ideas which were making for monotheism.

Baal worship and Yahweh worship came into violent collision in the reign of Ahab ; but it must be noted that it was a new Baal worship. The fight was with the Tyrian Baal, of whom Jezebel was a devotee, not with the older Canaanite Baal. The narratives give the impression that Yahweh worship was in its death-throes. Elijah says, “ The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword ; and I, even I only, am left.” ¹

¹ I Kings xix. 14.

But this is the exaggeration of a depressed and fugitive prophet. The answer comes " Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him " ; and in II Kings x. 23, the natural meaning of the verse is that all the Baal worshippers could be assembled in the single temple of Baal at Samaria. Ahab was a weak king under the dominance of his wife ; but his children have names in which the word Yahweh enters as a compound. It is Jezebel who seeks Elijah's life, not Ahab. After the matter of Naboth's vineyard Ahab offers a sincere repentance. And it is clear that a large number of Yahweh's prophets were still in existence at the close of Ahab's reign.

The crisis was brought about by the determined opposition of Elijah to the introduction of Tyrian Baal worship. The fact that the opposition was offered surely suggests that the easy accommodation between Yahweh and Baal worship had by now been overcome and that Yahweh was, in theory at any rate, recognized as the only God for Israel. The victory had taken a long time to achieve. But it had been won, and Elijah and his

supporters were not going to have the clock of history put back.

Is there a more dramatic figure in the Old Testament than Elijah? Is there any literature more stirring than these ancient Elijah stories? In Elijah we see one who was the near forerunner of the great prophets. No doubt he had superstitions in his religion. He is painted, as has been pointed out, in a semi-magical light. He sits on Carmel with his head between his knees as a rain-charmer.¹ He eats food brought by an angel, and in the strength of it travels forty days and forty nights.² In an ecstatic condition he runs before Ahab's chariot to Jezreel.³ But the real man is the man, who in the name of God and of morality, faces an angry king and reproves him for his crime.⁴ His face is alight with righteous indignation. In his soul he is always hearing the "still small voice" of God. Years before another prophet—also a forerunner of the great prophets, who were the conscience of the nation, and the mouthpiece of a God, whose name is Holy—had dared to reprove a king. Nathan did not mince words with David. "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is worthy to die"; and then follows the tremendous "Thou

¹ I Kings xviii. 42; ² xix. 8; ³ xviii. 46; ⁴ I Kings xxi. 20.

art the man.”¹ This is what we have to remember as we study the development of religion in early Israel, that, mixed up with magic and superstition, was the sense of character in God. We are compelled to believe that there was a strong ethical element in the religion of Moses; that though the God of Horeb may have been regarded as a Nature deity, whose home was on a mountain, where the crash of the thunder in its caves instilled awe into his worshippers and the mountain mists veiled from human eyes a God in human form, yet that God was not a mere Nature deity, indifferent to moral distinctions but One whom even in those early days the people were taught to regard as a God of righteousness. Other religions know of seers or medicine men working themselves up into a frenzy, of the gods speaking to men in dreams and trances, of sacred places where divine footsteps are believed to have trodden. But where in all the cults of heathenism will you find men like Nathan and Elijah, witnesses for the sanctity of the moral law, testifying to the moral character of God, asserting God’s demand that men shall rule their lives by the standards of righteousness? And where, save in the religion

¹ II Samuel xii. 5, 7.

of Israel, will you find such an advance from the crude and the imperfect to the splendour of the prophetic conception of God? Yet there is talk to-day about the Old Testament being an antiquated volume!

CHAPTER VIII

AMOS AND HOSEA

"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." AMOS iv. 12.

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." HOSEA xiv. 1.

NOWHERE have the newer critical studies of the Old Testament been more fruitful in results than in the investigation of the prophetical writings. Problems of date and authorship still remain unsolved ; but, speaking broadly, we can say that it is now possible to assign the bulk of the prophecies to their proper historical periods to see how they grew out of contemporary conditions, and to trace the stages in the evolution of what is admittedly the most remarkable phenomenon in Hebrew religion. A century ago prediction was regarded as the characteristic feature in prophecy. To-day we realize that the work of the prophet was many-sided. We think of him less as a predictor of the future than as the embodied conscience of the nation, the revealer of God's will and character, the religious interpreter of national history, the exponent of the eternal principles of justice and righteousness. There

is prediction in prophecy, but we must not think of the prophets as men somehow marvellously inspired to know the detailed happenings of a distant future. We must think of them rather as the instruments of an immanent divine purpose which was progressively fulfilling itself in history. Some glimpse of this purpose they had ; they realized that God was ordering events to an end ; but it was not given to them to know either when the divine purpose would be fulfilled or the precise manner of its fulfilment. It is we, the heirs of the ages, who can discern in the Hebrew prophecy a deeper meaning than the prophets themselves saw in it, because we can view the movement as a whole and set it in its relation to the fulfilment which it received in Christ. To a large number of Christian people prophecy is a sealed book or is studied mainly with a view to extracting from it supposed predictions relating to the end of the world. The loss to the cause of intelligent religion is incalculable. As has been already said, here in Hebrew prophecy are the foundations of our modern theism ; here is the transcript of a living religious experience which has provided the moulds into which our own religious experience is cast. Here are ancient writings so modern in tone and spirit that they

suit wonderfully the circumstances of our own day. Here, finally, is the literature which helped to shape the consciousness of Jesus. Prophecy was His special study. He claimed spiritual affinity with the prophets; in their work He saw the designed beginnings of a movement which received in Himself its crown and completion.

Let us examine in this chapter what contribution to the Idea of God was made respectively by the prophets Amos and Hosea. Amos is the earliest of the writing prophets; with him prophecy proper may be said to begin. Both he and Hosea belong to the same quarter of the eighth century B.C., though Amos began his work rather earlier than did Hosea. Amos prophesied in the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, somewhere between the years 760 and 745. Hosea too began to prophesy before Jeroboam died in 743, but went on prophesying for another ten years. Both men prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel, of which Hosea was a native. Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah, but travelled to the northern markets to sell his wool, and while there delivered his message. The two, as we shall see, are different in temperament, outlook and religious teaching.

Yet both agree in certain, large fundamental ideas. Both were creative minds of the first order; and in their writings taken together are to be found in germ if not in maturity, most of the ideas which later prophecy helped to develop.

1. *Amos*. He comes before us as a solitary figure, apparently without friend or disciple. He stands in sharp contrast with the prevailing temper of his time. He is a countryman, a shepherd who lived a lonely life with his flocks in the high uplands of Tekoa twelve miles south of Jerusalem, and he attacks the luxury of the city life of the north. Town and country, the simplicity of a desert life and the artificial civilization of a town life—this contrast runs through all his writings. He was a layman, belonging neither to priestly family nor official prophetic school, who received the inner call of God in his soul; and he was faced with a corrupt, conventional religion of sacrifice, feast-day and fast-day; organized by a priesthood which was more concerned with cultus than morality, and enjoyed the patronage of the royal court. He prophesied because necessity was laid upon him. He was gripped by an inner compulsion. God sent him out to speak; he wanted no other credentials than the

imperious voice of his own conscience. The desert, which has so often proved itself the cradle of religion, taught him by its sounds and silences to be spiritually alert, brought him face to face with God, fitted him to see human life in the light of the eternal moral verities, made him conscious of a vocation, and endowed him with the ethical austerity needed in one who was to be a prophet of judgment and denunciation.¹ Sternness breathes in almost every line he wrote; he scornfully tears to shreds the popular sophistries of his day. He faces up to the ultimate realities. For him God is a Living God, a God of moral character, a God who acts in history, a God who is "a consuming fire." "The two things," said Kant, "that move my wonder most are the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." Amos must have felt the same. He cries, "Seek him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night."² "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought,

¹ My debt to Sir George Adam Smith's masterly interpretations of Amos and Hosea in his *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, is great.

² v. 8.

that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the Lord, the God of hosts in his name.”¹

The teaching of Amos about God is clear. We may sum it up under the following heads.

(a) God is a God of moral character, who requires morality in His worshippers. Nor is it only of Israel that He requires morality. The book of Amos opens with a series of denunciations upon the surrounding nations, and the burden of them all is that these nations have violated the elementary principles of morality and humanity. They showed no pity in war. Tyre “delivered up the whole people to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant.”² Barbaric cruelty marked the conduct of Ammon. Amos appeals to the common constitution of humanity, to the conscience which is in all men, to the sympathy which slumbers even in the most hardened breast. If the case of the surrounding nations is bad, the case of Israel is worse; for they stand in covenant relationship with God. No plea can be made for Israel that it is ignorant of what God requires of them. Does not their past history witness to God’s care for them?

¹ iv. 12, 13; ² i. 9.

“Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites.”¹ “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” But they had forgotten that privilege implies responsibility. “You only have I known . . . therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities.”²

The complaint of Amos is that Israel has lost sight of the fundamental truth that there is character in God. He seeks to recall to their minds the fact that the real heart of religion is ethical. There is always danger in every age that the ritual and ceremonial element in religion shall overpower the moral element. That it had done so in the popular religion of Amos's day is abundantly clear. Hear the prophet's sarcasm, “Come to Bethel (the famous royal shrine) and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days; and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings and publish them; for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel.”³ Streaming altars, crowded festivals, meal offerings and burnt offerings without stint; and along with them

¹ ii. 10; ² iii. 2; ³ iv. 4, 5.

the cry of the oppressed poor, shameless luxury, commercial dishonesty, and gross immorality. As for sacrifice, let them listen to God's question : " Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel." ¹ This is an important passage, especially when taken in connection with the explicit statement of Jeremiah that sacrifice was no part of the original revelation given to the nation : " For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices ; but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people ; and walk ye in the way that I command you, that it may be well with you." ² Sacrifice was common to all the Semites ; it was part of the ethnic religion, which underlay revealed religion. Israel adopted the principle of sacrifice, but (and here no doubt they were influenced by the Canaanite worship they found in the land) allowed it to become the dominant element in religion. The popular religion was utterly corrupt ; it was the natural outgrowth of the corrupt civilization. Under Jeroboam II the northern

¹ v. 25 ; ² vii. 22, 23.

kingdom of Israel had grown rich. He was a victorious king, who had enlarged the borders of the nation. Israel settled down to a city life and a commercial life. We get a picture in Amos of a thoroughly corrupt social order; immense wealth and luxury at the top, great poverty and slavery at the bottom. How this hardy peasant inveighs against the houses of ivory, the silken cushions, the bowls of wine, the languorous music, the fashionable women of the day, whom with scornful bluntness he calls "kine of Bashan." ¹

(b) The sovereign power of God is a central idea in the prophet's theology. God rules history. He is the God of Israel, but the conception of a national deity is merged in the larger conception of a sovereign ruler of the universe. Amos rises to the thought of a philosophy of history. The migrations of peoples, the sequence of historical events, the whole complex life of humanity is under the control of Yahweh. He puts into God's mouth these words: "Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?" ² Put together the two things, the righteousness of God and the sovereign

¹ iv. 1; ² ix. 7.

power of God and the result can only be judgment upon wrong-doing. Amos is essentially the prophet of judgment. There is hardly a note of tenderness in his writings. He warns impenitent Israel of the punishment in store for them if they do not repent; but he sees that repentance is a forlorn hope. Their doom is sure. And he sees the form which their punishment will take. "Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts." ¹ "For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the Lord, the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the brook of the Arabah." ²

Who was this nation which was to be the hammer of judgment on Israel? Amos does not name it, but he clearly has in mind the rising power of Assyria. And how quickly did his words come true! In 721 B.C. Sargon captured Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel came to an end. In his commentary on Amos in *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Sir G. Adam Smith says: "By far the greatest event in the eighth century before Christ was the appearance of Assyria in Palestine." He

¹ v. 27; ² vi. 14.

goes on to show that the importance of Assyria is to be seen in connection with the development of Hebrew religion. Try to picture the effect upon the imagination of a Hebrew of the advance of Assyria, an advance as resistless as that of the tides. What petty state could withstand her? The gods of the nations were powerless. Here was a vast heathen power with countless armies sweeping over the Semite world. Culture, religion, ordered national life—for these she cared nothing. She was the incarnation of brute force. What would happen to Palestine, a small country about the size of Wales, when this terrible foe reached it? If any of the light-hearted dwellers in Samaria ever gave a thought to the matter they must have trembled at the prospect.

Now the interesting thing to note is that Amos and the other prophets of the Assyrian period never treat Assyria as a problem or hopeless riddle.¹ They treat her as the instrument of Yahweh, the executor of the divine judgment. Assyria might be vast but Yahweh who controlled history was mightier. The impact of Assyria on Israel might mean sore trouble for the latter; but did not Israel deserve punishment, and was there not a

¹ cp. Sir G. Adam Smith op. cit. vol I, p. 51.

design of God behind this chastisement? Amos, it is true, sees no vision of a restored and purified Israel; for the concluding section of the book is obviously the work of a later hand; but Hosea and Isaiah saw such a vision, and for them there was always light in the darkness. The light which shone for Amos was his certainty of the character of God and of the immutable laws of right. When he gave up prophesying and returned to Tekoa to ponder, and probably to put into writing his scattered prophecies, like Mycerinus in the old Greek story who fled from his throne and took refuge in some oasis by the Nile, he must have fallen back upon God, conscience, duty, the inner mysteries of the human spirit, and by that silent knowledge have been "calm'd, ennobled, comforted, sustained."

Amos was the first to take the step which made Israel reach a truly monotheistic conception of God. "By shattering the tribes," says Sir George Adam Smith, "Assyria shattered the tribal theory of religion." Also the fact that all the petty nations were equally victims of Assyria helped Israel to teach a truer conception of the essential unity of mankind; a conception which in its turn helped to develop the idea of the unity of God. One more

sentence from the same author may be quoted :
“ It was far easier to imagine a sovereign Providence when Assyria reduced history to a unity by overthrowing all the rulers and all their gods than when history was broken up into the independent fortunes of many states, each with its own religion divinely valid in its own territory.” ¹

For Amos, then, Yahweh the God of Israel is the God of the whole earth and the God of the heavens, whose starry hosts He marshals. His power is absolute ; His character is righteousness ; His purposes are righteous. None can escape His judgment. “ Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them ; and though they climb up into heaven, thence will I bring them down.” ² Israel was deluded in thinking that they were the favourites of God and so would escape punishment. Just because their privileges had been greater their chastisement would be severer. They looked forward to a “ Day of the Lord,” when God would by some signal act vindicate His original choice of Israel and shower blessings on them. “ Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord ! wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord ? it is darkness and not

¹ *op. cit.*, vol. I., p. 54 ; ² ix. 2.

light.”¹ The last vision in the book symbolizes the temper of the whole and the temper of the prophet. “I saw the Lord standing beside the altar : and he said, Smite.”² The hammer of God’s righteousness would smash to fragments the whole of this corrupt civilization ; for “the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom.”³

2. *Hosea*. With Hosea we pass into a different atmosphere. We feel it the moment we read him. Amos the stern moralist is succeeded by a prophet of the tenderest heart. “Smite,” said Amos ; “Save, be gracious,” says Hosea, whose name means “salvation.” Amos shows very little sympathy for Israel. Hosea feels acutely their folly and sinfulness. He suffers with them. He knows that “love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice.” Sir George Adam Smith points out how this difference of temperament in the two prophets is reflected in their treatment of Nature.⁴ What pictures of Nature Amos gives are pictures of desolation, the land under drought or invaded by locusts : “the pastures of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.”⁵ In Hosea we have the redolence of the springtime, the vine and the corn and the lily, “the scent

¹ v. 18 ; ² ix. 1 ; ³ ix. 8 ; ⁴ op. cit. vol. I., p. 233 ; ⁵ i. 2.

of Lebanon ” ; and against this background human toil in ploughing, reaping, threshing, with the chaff rising and the doves circling in the air.

The personal life of Hosea presents a remarkable problem which must be dealt with shortly as it provides a key to his prophetic ministry. This is what he says of himself and his call : “ When the Lord spake at the first by Hosea, the Lord said unto Hosea, Go, take thee a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom : for the land doth commit great whoredom departing from the Lord. So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim.” ¹ Many have treated this story as a parable or allegory invented by the prophet to illustrate Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. But this is to miss the key to Hosea’s experience. It is better to treat the statement as one of fact. Hosea’s wife was unfaithful to him. Not when he first married her. Then the domestic life was happy, and was an illustration of that early fidelity of Israel to God which the prophet describes. It is the falling away of the nation from its original loyalty that causes him such pain. But if we assume that his wife did not become unfaithful till later, we must interpret

¹ i. 2, 3.

his statement that his first call from God was to "take thee a wife of whoredom" as representing his later understanding of God's purpose. God knew all from the beginning. Hosea did not know what would happen. Later, when it had happened, and he sits down to describe his call, he reads back into the past his subsequent knowledge. "Hosea, by a very natural anticipation, in which he is imitated by other prophets, pushed back his own knowledge of God's purpose to the date when that purpose began actually to be fulfilled, the day of his betrothal. This, though he was all unconscious of its fatal future, had been to Hosea the beginning of the word of the Lord.¹" That his wife's infidelity came later is rendered more probable by the names given to the children. The first child, a boy, is called Jezreel. The second, a girl, is Lo-ruhamah, "uncompassionated," "a stranger to a father's love."² Hosea disowns this child. The third child, a boy, is Lo-ammi, "Not my people," or "no kin of mine." He too is disowned. Gomer then left him and disappears for a while, drifting probably into slavery from which Hosea, it would seem, subsequently redeemed her. He took her back

¹ *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. I., pp. 238-239.

² She-that-never-knew-a-father's-love. (Adam Smith.)

to his house. His love followed her and saved her.

By this strange experience of domestic discipline and sorrow was Hosea fitted to be the prophet of love and tenderness. Amos brooding in the silences of the desert, watching the stars in the courses, learned that God was the upholder of the moral order and the stern judge of iniquity. Hosea, disciplined by the agony of a private grief, wounded where his love was tenderest, learned that there was sorrow in the divine heart ; passed behind God as Law to God as Love ; did not forget judgment, but felt that he had more chance to win his people to repentance if he put pleading before threatening, and set forth the pain of God rather than the anger of God. The cross in his own life he boldly transfers to the life of God. In his teaching about God Hosea comes very near to the spirit of the Christian Gospel. There is no Christ in his picture ; but there is such a revelation of divine compassion that you feel it is not strange when centuries later one who, like Hosea, had pondered long upon the divine nature, penned the words " God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

With all that Amos says about God Hosea

agrees. God is Righteousness ; God is Judge. He must punish iniquity. The punishment of Israel draws closer every day. On the death of Jeroboam II follow some ten years of growing disorder in the northern kingdom. A succession of short-lived monarchs occupies the throne. Plots, murders, violence, anarchy, all these signs of a state in dissolution are reflected in Hosea's writings. But the nation takes no heed to these warnings. Amos, as we have seen, felt that repentance was practically impossible for Israel. Hosea feels it too ; but with a passionate sorrow to which Amos was a stranger. His sorrow is all the greater, because Israel has forgotten God's love for them, does not realize how they are wounding the heart of One who only longs to forgive and bless them. Can anything be more pathetic than words like these, words put by the prophet into the mouth of God ?—" O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away"¹ ; or this wistful turning to the past, so full of promise, so charged with possibilities of vocation and service : " When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt"² ;

¹ vi. 4 ; ² xi. 1.

“ O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God ; for thou hast fallen by thy iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord ; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good ” ; and the divine answer “ I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” ¹

Amos (for we cannot accept as genuine the picture of restoration at the close of his book) sees no ray of hope in the dark future of Israel. Hosea, on the other hand, is sure that God will be gracious, and his prophecy ends with these words : “ I will be as the dew unto Israel ; he shall blossom as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon . . . Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols ? ” ² Hosea was the first prophet to attack idol-worship. The restored nation will have a clearer conception of the nature of God.

All those pictures of future restoration, of the good time coming, will be dealt with in the chapter on Messianic prophecy. Hosea's hope is mentioned here, only because there seems to be a kind of inevitability about his optimism. How could the God he describes, a God so tender of heart, so patient with His

¹ xiv. 1, 2, 4 ; ² xiv. 5-8.

wayward people, be content to see the utter failure of His redemptive purpose? Is not Love essentially optimistic? Could it endure as it does if there were no prospect that in the long run it would win? The optimism of love is no shallow thing. If it sings "God's in his heaven, All's right with the world," it really means "all will be right with the world," because divine love must triumph. Love's optimism is born of the knowledge that pain and self-sacrifice merely feed love's flame. Love brightens as it burns, but its burning is torture. Hosea knew enough of God to be assured that His purpose of redemption must win through to victory at the last. Israel did not know God, had no real vision of His character and purposes. This is the core of the prophet's criticism of his nation. We notice how frequently Hosea speaks of Israel's want of knowledge of God. He did not mean merely intellectual apprehension; he meant sympathetic understanding, the insight by one person into the real character of another. "There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." ¹ "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." ² "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the

¹ iv. 1; ² iv. 6.

knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”¹ “Ephraim is like a silly dove without understanding.”² Israel ought to have known God, because of their experience of His providence in the past. Again and again Hosea dwells upon the past of Israel, so full of divine guidance and tokens of the love of God. And filled with the sense of divine historic purpose and idealizing the nation’s past, when all seemed full of promise, he takes the old framework of the desert wanderings and uses it again for one of his pictures of the future. It was in the desert when they had escaped from Egypt, that their fathers first learned of God’s providential care. To the desert the prophet, nay God, will bring them again. They will be taken from their own land ; they will be carried captive, as a punishment and discipline. They will be put in the wilderness ; and there, severed from the luxuries of city life, with the wide spaces of nature round them, they will repent and respond to the gracious touch of God. “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope ; and she shall

¹ vi. 6 ; ² vii. 11.

make answer there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt . . . and I will betroth thee unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and in judgment, and in loving-kindness and in mercies . . . and thou shalt know the Lord.” ¹

As we look back over the work of these two prophets, so different to each other, each the complement of the other, we realize how great was the religious advance which they made. The popular religion remained much what it had been with all its crudities and superstitions ; but with Amos and Hosea the star of a true monotheism rose in the sky, never again to set. Neither of them formulated a thought-out doctrine of monotheism. No prophet produced a speculative system ; the method of prophecy was entirely different. The flash of intuition ; the creative idea thrown out and left to germinate ; the enunciation, often in sporadic and occasional manner, of some principle pregnant with life were the instruments used by the prophets in their educative task. And it may have been that Hosea did not deny the existence of other gods. But both he and Amos were convinced that Yahweh was the only God worth

¹ ii. 14, 15, 19, 20.

considering. We have here teaching which cannot be called anything but monotheistic. One God of supreme authority, Creator and Ruler of the universe, is the background of all their instruction. Their monotheism is ethical. God has a moral character. They insist with tremendous emphasis that the heart of religion is ethical. Over against the sacrificial cultus, with all its ritual and ceremonial observances, they set the duty of serving God in those every-day social activities and relationships which make up the common life of man. They came very near to the New Testament doctrine that love of God and love of one's neighbour are the summary of the law. They would have approved St. James's saying: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." ¹

For both the nation was their chief concern. In primitive society the unit is always the group, the tribe or the nation. The sense of individuality, with all the personal responsibility that it implies is a later growth. It was markedly so in the case of the religion of Israel. As we shall see, the growth of this sense was

¹ i. 27.

largely due to the work of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But what we must notice is that Hosea prepared the way for it. His teaching about the love of God contains implicitly the doctrine that God loves and deals with the individual soul, because love's object is the individual person. "He calleth his own sheep by name."

As we study the later developments of the prophetic idea of God we shall find that the great outlines were drawn firmly by Hosea and Amos. There is development, but the new grows out of the old and is implicit in the old. We can but marvel at the achievement of these two men. They "being dead yet speak to us." If for Samaria you substitute London, we shall find how modern is their message. We have the Christ: they had not; but without their work Christ would not have been. For in prophecy we have a growing spiritual movement which is crowned by Christianity; and a doctrine of God with the living heart of which the mind of Jesus was in complete accord. Did not these men speak under the inspiration of the Spirit?

CHAPTER IX

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD IN ISAIAH AND JEREMIAH

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of his glory. ISAIAH vi. 3.

O Lord, my strength, and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of affliction. JEREMIAH xvi. 19.

THE last chapter dealt with the conception of God in Amos and Hosea. In their writings are to be found most of the main ideas about God which appear in subsequent prophecy. But these ideas are taken up and developed by their successors. A fresh mind and a fresh experience reveal a new meaning in the ideas. The ideas passing through the medium of a living personality win a richer significance. Thus does truth grow by a process of interchange between itself and life.

In the present chapter we are to see how Isaiah and Jeremiah dealt with the legacy of thought about God left them by Amos and Hosea. Isaiah is more markedly the spiritual heir of Amos, Jeremiah of Hosea ; but Jeremiah would not have denied what Amos affirmed, nor would Isaiah have repudiated the teaching of Hosea. It is mainly a matter of emphasis

and selection ; and this in turn is in part determined by temperament, in part by the social and political circumstances in which each prophet found himself.

I. Let us begin with Isaiah, whose prophecies are contained in the first thirty-nine chapters of our present Book of Isaiah. He is certainly the greatest of the eighth century prophets of the Assyrian period. He began to prophesy somewhere about 740 B.C. He was a child when Amos reached the crisis of his career, and was growing up to manhood when Hosea prophesied. Micah was his younger contemporary. He was still alive and at work in 701 B.C., when Jerusalem was marvellously delivered from Sennacherib's beseiging army, and may have lived on (though it is doubtful) into the reign of Manasseh, the destroyer of the religious reformation of Hezekiah. What changes in the political world Isaiah saw ! In 745 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser III ascended the throne of Assyria and began his career of conquest. Damascus was captured in 734, and Gilead and Galilee were over-run. In 725 Salmanassar IV invaded Northern Palestine. Samaria was beseiged and fell to Sargon in 721, and the northern kingdom of Israel came to an end. In 719 Sargon defeated Egypt at Raphia on the Egyptian

border, and in 711 invaded Palestine. He captured Babylon two years later. In 705 Sennacherib succeeded Sargon ; Palestine was again invaded, but Jerusalem was preserved, the Assyrian army perishing by pestilence.

Isaiah's prophecies reflect all this changing scene : in fact a large part of them are definitely called out by the developing political crisis. He is pre-eminently the example of the statesman prophet. His career illustrates the varied character of the prophetic office. Politics, national and international, are for him the field in which God's plan is being developed, where the divine activity can be seen in operation. The note of impending crisis sounds throughout his writings. For him God is in the earthquake, wind and fire, as much as in " the still small voice " speaking in the soul. A master of style, gifted with a brilliant imagination, and with a power of seeing directly into the heart of a situation, forceful, sagacious, balanced in temperament and outlook, and possessed of a deep religious insight, he is, if not the most interesting, at least the noblest and greatest of the Hebrew prophets.

We saw that Amos taught that God was the sovereign ruler of the universe, who controlled the march of history and the movements of nations ;

and that He was a God of moral character, who required moral conduct in His worshippers. Such a conception of God may truly be called ethical monotheism. What advance on the teaching of Amos does Isaiah make? In the first place his monotheism is more trenchantly asserted. Idols are nothing : other gods do not exist ; they are creations of a blinded human imagination, " that which his fingers have made." ¹ In the second place, for Isaiah the sole supremacy of God is a truth which lives and burns in his experience. It is no abstract doctrine ; it is vitally concrete. It possesses him with a richness of meaning which he feels he cannot exhaust. The key to his thought of God is to be found in Chapter VI which gives an account of his inaugural vision, when in a state probably of trance he " saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple " : and heard the chant of the attendant seraphim, " Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of his glory." The impression made upon him was that he was in the presence of a Being of transcendent majesty and glory and holiness ; and by contrast he knew himself to be " a man of unclean lips " and to " dwell in the midst of

¹ xvii. 8.

a people of unclean lips." He had seen "the King, the Lord of hosts," and the vision was overpowering. At the basis of all that the prophet has to teach about God lies this sense of God's majesty and holiness. "The Holy One of Israel" is one of his favourite titles for God.

Now we must be careful to interpret rightly this epithet "holy." It probably is derived from a root which signifies "separation" or "distance," and so emphasizes the gap between the human and the divine. "When it is applied to men or things it is used to indicate their relation to deity."¹ In its earliest use the word "holy" does not convey the idea of moral quality, which it conveys to us now. Nor as an epithet applied to God did it originally mean anything ethical. Let me quote from Davidson: "In its use as applied to Jehovah, it is a general term expressing Godhead. But, of course, "Godhead" was never a mere abstract conception. Some attribute or characteristic was always in the person's view which betokened Godhead. Hence the term "holy" is applied to Jehovah when manifesting any attributes which are the token of Godhead . . . Thus "holy" acquired contents, and one prophet puts one kind of contents into it and another

¹ A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 145.

another.”¹ What contents did Isaiah put into it? He certainly put an ethical content into it, because when the sense of the holiness of God burst upon him, he became aware of his own sinfulness. What he put into it was just everything that the Living God could mean for one who had dedicated himself to His service ; but the emphasis is upon the transcendent greatness and aliveness of God. Isaiah felt that he was in the presence of a Being who was intensely alive ; whose activity was visible in the march of current events ; who had moral character and required moral conduct of men ; who was to be adored and worshipped because He was so majestic and glorious ; whose eyes, as it were, searched all things through and through ; in the fire of whose holiness all human vanities and false imaginings about deity would be scorched to nothingness. We are far beyond Amos here. Here is speculative truth glowing with passion. Here is monotheism making its reality felt as a thing that burns and pulses and stings. The “glory” of God which filled the earth is the outward manifestation of the inward transcendent greatness of God. Nature is the very garment of deity. In cloud and sunshine and storm and torrent ; in the verdure

¹ *op. cit.* pp. 145-146.

of the fields, in the wonder of the starry heavens, Isaiah saw the tokens of the presence of the Living God.

All the prophets think of Israel as standing in a special relation to God. With Jeremiah and Ezekiel religion as a matter for the individual soul begins to come into prominence. But even with them the nation is still regarded as the unit, and their appeals and warnings are addressed to the nation. The individual had, of course, his religious duties, but he is thought of as part of the nation, whose sins he shares. Our modern sense of individualism was not in existence when the Hebrew prophets wrote. Amos emphasizes the special relation between Israel and God, for example in the famous saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."¹ But Isaiah develops the conception in the following way. He sets Israel's special relation to God against the background of a purpose of God, which God is progressively carrying out. This purpose is being fulfilled in the events of history. Israel, just because of its special relation to God, ought to be able to see this purpose in operation.²

¹ iii. 2; ² cp. Skinner's *Isaiah* in Cambridge Bible. Introd., pp. lii, liii.

But Israel is blind. This is what he says of the leaders of the nation: "they regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of his hands."¹ Not only were they blind, but they mocked at this idea of a divine plan moving to its climax. They say, "Let him make speed, let him hasten His work that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it."² We cannot read Isaiah's prophecies without seeing how full his mind was of this working out of a divine plan. He saw in history God in action. Events were rapidly moving to a consummation. "For a consummation, and that determined, shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, make in the midst of all the earth."³ Or again, "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations."⁴ The goal to which events are moving is the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness upon the earth, and the vindication of the majesty and glory of God. Isaiah therefore shows an advance upon Amos in two directions. First, just because he lived in an age of political convulsions, he saw more clearly than his predecessor God's activity in

¹ v. 12; ² v. 19; ³ x. 23; ⁴ xiv. 26.

contemporary history. Secondly, he finds in the thought of God's special relation to Israel a ground of hope, which is absent in Amos. Like Amos Isaiah is a prophet of judgment. He dwells upon the severity of God, and does not mention the tenderer aspects of the divine character, which was Hosea's theme. Cataclysm, upheaval, ruin are printed large upon his prophecies. Yet beyond the storm he sees calm, beyond the turmoil peace. God is going to establish a new and better order of things ; and in that order Israel will have a share, because God will be faithful to His covenant with the nation.

Let us consider this point, as throwing still further light upon the prophet's conception of God. Isaiah speaks of a Remnant which shall be saved, when God's final visitation comes upon the world. The doctrine of a Remnant was not new ; it was a traditional element in prophecy. Thus the word came to the despondent Elijah : " Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." ¹ Even in Amos, the prophet of unrelieved gloom, occurs the phrase, " It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will

¹ I Kings xix. 18.

be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.”¹ The interpretation of the passage is in dispute ; but Driver says of it : “ The passage contains in germ the doctrine of the preservation, through judgment, of a faithful remnant, which became shortly afterwards a distinctive feature in the teaching of Isaiah.”²

This doctrine of the Remnant first appears in Isaiah’s teaching at the time when a joint attack on Judah was planned by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah king of Samaria, with the object of compelling Judah to join a league of states formed with the purpose of resisting Assyria. Ahaz, a weak king, was on the throne of Judah. We read in Chapter vii how Isaiah went to meet the king, taking with him his young son Shear-jashub, which means “ a remnant shall turn (to God).” Isaiah wished to persuade Ahaz not to put himself under Assyrian protection as a security against this invasion. Let him trust God, who would deliver Judah. But Ahaz refused to obey. It is probable that, while the prophet accepted the destruction of the northern kingdom as inevitable, and saw no hope there of the survival of any but a few chance individuals, who might be left “ as gleanings, as the shaking of an olive

¹ v. 15 ; ² cp. *Amos*, in Cambridge Bible, note on passage.

tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough,"¹ up to 735 B.C. the year of his interview with Ahaz, he had hopes that all Judah might be saved, if the nation would adopt his advice ; advice which he gave in the name of God. But when Ahaz went his own way, Isaiah's hope for the nation as a whole vanished. The Remnant that would be saved would be the nucleus of a few faithful Israelites who would enter the Messianic kingdom. In viii. 16 we read, "Bind thou up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples," which seems to imply that the prophet gathered round himself a band of faithful adherents. These may be regarded as part of the Remnant. It was Isaiah's conviction that a leaven was working in the mass of the nation. There was a core of true religion, and a purified Israel would remain after the final catastrophe, to be the germ from which a new nation would grow.

One other point may be mentioned. In close connection with the thought of God's special relation to Israel is developed in the later years of Isaiah's activity the conviction of the Inviolability of Zion. Zion the special seat of the Divine Presence, will be the metropolis of the future Messianic kingdom. " And

¹ xvii. 6.

it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills : and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob ; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." ¹ This general view of the spiritual supremacy of Zion becomes connected with the inviolability of Zion. Elsewhere occurs the phrase, " Jehovah hath founded Zion, and there the afflicted of his people take refuge." ² Zion is to be a home for the faithful Remnant. There is considerable variety of opinion as to the exact significance of his conception. Does the prophet think only of the inviolability of Mount Zion the seat of the Temple, or of the inviolability of the whole city ? How far are his words to be taken literally, or how far are they to be interpreted ideally ? ³ That the prophet meant that the actual city of Jerusalem would be delivered at the time of Sennacherib's invasion

¹ ii. 3, 4 ; ² xiv. 32 ; ³ cp. Skinner's *Isaiah* in Cambridge Bible, Introd. p. lxviii.

is certain. And the city was saved, as we know. This doctrine of Zion's inviolability is important, because it seems to have become a popular dogma in the time of Jeremiah, who had occasion to criticize it.

Isaiah has been called "the prophet of faith." What this means is that in him we see a man entirely possessed with the sense of the Living God, and of God's activity in human affairs. The stability of the divine character and purpose, the assurance that God was a Being of transcendent goodness and wisdom, who was revealing Himself to Israel, are the conceptions upon which Isaiah's mind rests secure. Hence he can say, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved: in quietness and confidence shall be your strength," ¹ or "he that believeth shall not make haste." ² In the confusions and uncertainties of the political situation he calls upon the rulers of his people to rise to the height of a confident trust in God. When they failed so to rise, the prophet consoles himself with the thought of the Remnant, the principle of whose life is this operative trust in God. Is not this the same kind of teaching which Jesus gave, when He bade men trust the Heavenly Father and not be anxious or worried? Is not faith

¹ xxx. 15; ² xxviii. 16.

the central principle of Christianity? In days of turmoil and perplexity, when an old order seems to be in dissolution, we may well study the writings of Isaiah, and win from them the double assurance; first, that God has the world in His keeping; secondly that, because He is what He is, we may be certain that the purpose which is being worked out, despite appearances to the contrary, is a purpose of ultimate good.

2. We pass on to Jeremiah. His prophetic ministry lasted half a century, from 627-577 B.C. Jeremiah witnessed the death-agony of Judah, the capture and destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, saw the flower of the nation carried into exile, and the ancient kingdom of Israel come to an end. The note of tragedy and poignant sorrow breathes through his writings. Here was one called by God to preach to a people who paid no heed to his message. He saw the nation, which he loved, going down the road to ruin. He felt intensely for them. Like Hosea he carried his people in his heart, and suffered mental agony of the acutest kind when they remained blind and careless and indifferent. In the writings of Jeremiah, in addition to prophecy and history, there is much autobiography. The prophet

lays bare before us his sensitive, shrinking soul, shows us glimpses of his spiritual anguish, his wrestlings with God, his struggles to carry out the task which had been laid upon him. Take two such passages as these :

“ Oh Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I wast deceived : thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed : I am become a laughing-stock all the day, everyone mocketh me. For as often as I speak, I cry out ; I cry, Violence and spoil ; because the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me, and a derision all the day. And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain.”¹

“ Cursed be the day wherein I was born ; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee, making him very glad. . . . Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame ? ”²

There is no more human prophet than Jeremiah. There is none whose life is sadder ; there is none who, as we shall see, “ passing through the valley of weeping ” more richly made it “ a place of springs.” He and Hosea are the two “ martyr-prophets of the Old Testament.”

We can spend only a brief moment upon the story of his life. His call came to him in the

¹ xx. 7-9 ; ² xx. 14, 15, 18.

thirteenth year of Josiah, just when a religious reformation had begun with the object of purging the land of the abuses and abominations fostered in the long reign of Manasseh. Jeremiah was a countryman of the village of Anathoth, near Jerusalem. We are told that he was "the son of Hilkiah of the priests that were at Anathoth." From his earliest days therefore he would have been brought up in a religious atmosphere. As we read the story of his call, we see how the impression was left on him that God had, before he was born, pre-ordained him to this ministry.¹ Divine compulsion is laid on him. There is a natural shrinking, "Ah! Lord God, behold I cannot speak: for I am a child,"² but the call is obeyed and for fifty years Jeremiah remains true to the call; though again and again we see the conflict raging between his natural emotions and sympathies and the divine necessity which impels him to speak of impending ruin and judgment. Isaiah's call came to him when he was overwhelmed with the vision of the majesty and splendour of the Lord, and his cleansing was effected by the heavenly seraph touching his lips with a glowing coal. "But God meets with Jeremiah on life's common way,

¹ i. 5; ² i. 6.

standing by his side, and Himself laying His hand on this mouth. His presence inspires no terror or crushing sense of personal guilt, but only a natural shrinking from the greatness of the task allotted to him; a striking contrast both to the "Woe is me!" of Isaiah, and his eager "Here am I."¹

Jeremiah watched Judah rush to ruin. He was not carried into exile in Babylon, but remained behind with Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Chaldean king; and this period seems to have been the happiest in his life. Finally, he was taken into Egypt, when, against his advice, after the murder of Gedaliah, the leaders of the people decided to seek Egyptian protection against the probable anger of Nebuchadnezzar at the murder of his officer. He seems to have died in Egypt; and tradition says he was martyred. So far as we can gather, his life closed in gloom and sadness. He was unmarried. He felt himself called, as he tells us, to renunciation of home joys and social joys.² Hosea's experience came to him through the sorrows of his home life. Jeremiah trod a solitary road with enemies and persecutors all around him; his pure soul loathing

¹ Skinner's *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 27. I wish to acknowledge the help I have received from this book; * xvi. 1-9.

the evil which flaunted itself unabashed in Jerusalem, tortured by having to preach a message which he knew would be unavailing, seeing often only "clouds and darkness" round about God, yet sure that "righteousness and judgment" were "the habitation of his seat."

What was his contribution to the doctrine of God? It cannot be said that he taught any new truth about God's character. Amos, Hosea and Isaiah had already laid firmly the lines of the doctrine of God. But Jeremiah, because of the depth of his religious experience, is able to present God in a personal way which is all his own. He has known for himself how God tries the reins and the heart;¹ how close He comes to human life. Hence he presents God with an awareness and intimacy unparalleled in any other prophet, and in so doing, as Skinner points out, profoundly alters the conception of religion. This alteration had far-reaching results, some of which we are now to consider.

Let us try to put ourselves into the place of this prophet, lonely, persecuted, living through a period in which he saw a nation's life crumbling away, till finally that life as it had existed for centuries ceased to be. What effect would all

¹ xi. 20.

this have upon our faith? One of two things surely would happen. Either we should abandon our faith, feeling that no explanation was possible of such strange events; or we should be driven to cling yet closer to God, saying with Job, "though he slay me, yet will I trust him." But in this latter case our faith would assume a different form. It would be the faith of an individual clinging to God, despite the break-up of the state and of the traditional state-worship. The note of individualism would sound loudly. Faith could only maintain itself if it passed beyond the customary forms of religion to religion as in essence a relation of the single soul to God. This is what happened to Jeremiah. He did not lose his faith; but he re-based it on an individualistic foundation.¹

The determining factor in Jeremiah's whole career was his realization that Judah was doomed. He saw the catastrophe coming. He assured himself that it was God's will that the nation should be destroyed and go into exile, and he counsels the exiles to settle down quietly in Babylon: "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it:

¹ cp. Skinner op. cit. ch. xi.

for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”¹ But what this meant for the whole future of religion was that henceforth true religion was possible in a new form. Up till now the religion of Israel had been the religion of a nation. State and Church, as we may say, were one. The nation had been the unit, and had been regarded by the prophets as the unit. They addressed their prophecies to the nation. The individual Israelite was viewed as a part of a larger whole. But now the national organization of religion had been destroyed. Religion, however, need not perish. There was a religious truth, a religious experience, independent of the institution in which it was embodied. Jeremiah found that truth, and lived it out in his experience, and so became the prophet of individualism. We find in Christianity the pure essence of spiritual religion. Local and institutional embodiments of Christianity are indeed necessary, but there is always danger lest the embodiment should check the free movement of the spirit of which it strives to be the expression and vehicle. No national form of religion, such as was Israel’s, can adequately express religion’s inner heart. “The higher prophecy of the Old Testament

¹ xxix. 7.

represents a transitional phase in the development of religion from a nationalistic basis, in which history is the chief medium of divine revelation, to an individual and universal basis, in which God enters into immediate fellowship with the human soul.”¹ In Jeremiah the notes of universalism and individualism sound loudly. He does not quite succeed in freeing religion of all its nationalistic limitations, or in attaining the sovereign, spiritual liberty revealed by Christ. But he sets both prophecy and religion in a new path of development, by showing that God is such that all men may enter into direct spiritual communion with Him.

An important problem in the life of Jeremiah is his attitude toward the religious reformation undertaken by Josiah. We remember how Hilkiah the priest found in the Temple the book of the law, and took it to Shaphan the scribe, saying: “I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.”² Shaphan took it to the King, and the reformation which followed was based on this book. That book was Deuteronomy; not the whole of it, but the central part of it. It was not written by Moses; but was the work of some prophetic school composed probably at the close of

¹ Skinner *op. cit.* p. 14; ² II Kings xxii. 8;

Manasseh's reign. Its influence was enormous, but we have no time to consider that now. What we are concerned with is Jeremiah's attitude towards this Deuteronomic reform. The probability is that at first he welcomed it. Indeed, how could he help welcoming any attempt to purify the religion of his nation? But later he found himself in growing opposition to it; and for these reasons, which bear closely upon what we have been saying about his general view of religion. First, though the reform began with the prophets, the execution of it fell into the hands of the priests, who were the official guardians of religion. The result was that ritual and ceremony began to take the first place, and the reformation failed as a moral reformation. Jeremiah's writings are full of complaints of the utterly unethetical character of the popular religion. Externals flourished, but with them went an entire disregard of morals, and a blindness to the character of God as a God of righteousness and judgment. Is it not a standing peril of religion that the outward takes the place of the inward?

Secondly, there was that in Jeremiah's inmost being, which told him that the real heart of religion was a relationship between the individual soul and God. His experience bore

this out. In loneliness and sorrow we learn things about ourselves and God which we learn nowhere else. Other prophets had insisted upon the secondary character of ritual, sacrifice, externals of worship. Jeremiah drives the truth home with the force of one who has walked alone with God as his only friend. There is one charming elegiac passage which must be quoted, because it gives his view of religion :

“ Yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times ; and the turtle and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming ; but my people know not the ordinance of the Lord. How do ye say, we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us ? But behold, the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely.” ¹

Religion is like the homing instinct of the bird : the soul makes straight for the Father's heart. But in the popular religion his nation reposed in false security on the belief that all was well because they had the written law and the scribe to interpret it, because they had the Temple, and Isaiah's word that Zion is inviolable, come what may.

Jeremiah, then, is the prophet of individual religion. But had he no idea of a restored community ? Was it sheer individualism ?

¹ viii. 7, 8.

Had he broken entirely with the idea of a national religion? No; not entirely. His main emphasis is on the communion of the single soul with God; yet he occupies a half-way position between the older conception of religion as a national thing, and that view of it which finds its essence in the relation of the individual soul to God.

Let us end with a brief discussion of this point. Isaiah taught that a remnant would survive, a remnant of the existing nation, from which would grow a new and purified nation. Jeremiah could see no germ of good anywhere in the existing nation. It had to be entirely destroyed. Yet could it be that God would be untrue to the covenant made of old with the nation? Was judgment the last word? No; for Jeremiah predicts a return from exile after seventy years. And he has much to say about a new covenant which God will establish. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . . and this is the covenant that I will make . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."¹

¹ xxxi. 31-33.

Many scholars argue that the passage about the New Covenant in Chapter xxxi is not genuine, because Jeremiah's conception of religion cannot be fitted into so formal a framework as that of a contractual relationship. But it must be remembered, on the other side, first, that when he refers to the Covenant the prophet has of set purpose reverted to the nationalistic conception of religion for which the idea of a covenant with the nation is essential ; secondly, that the terms of the renewed covenant are such as to emphasize some at any rate of the vital features of Jeremiah's view of religion. What are the notes of this new covenant ? (a) It is to be written in the heart. Religion is conceived as an inward, spiritual thing. (b) " All shall know me." Here springing from an individualism, which asserts that religion is native to man, and that all may have fellowship with God, is an implicit universalism ; because, if every Israelite could know God in the heart, could the same privilege be denied to the Gentile, seeing that all men are alike in constitution ?

One likes to think that in the prophet's darkened sky this gleam of light shone, this hope of a new covenant, this assurance that somewhere, somewhen, somehow, God would

rebuild on new lines, and with a new material, a spiritual community of new worshippers. And so we leave this most interesting of all the prophets, standing at the parting of the ways between a vanished old order and a new order which was to come he knew not how, embodying, as has been said, "the transition from the prophet to the Psalmist." Some of us, perhaps, in our hour of doubt or solitude, may go to his writings to learn what he has to teach us about prayer, of which he is one of the masters; about God the Searcher of the human heart; about vicarious suffering; about the reaction of a tired body upon the spirit; about doubt at its worst, when no small tempest lies upon us and neither sun nor stars appear. As we study him, he will speak to us with a living voice, for he has his sure place among the Immortals. We shall miss in him much that we find in Christ and Christianity; but we shall come away from him feeling this. Here is one who taught a truth so rich, so full of possibilities, that in a very special sense we can call him the forerunner of Him who is the world's Saviour, and humanity's universal light.

CHAPTER X

ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM ; EZEKIEL ;

SECOND ISAIAH

To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him ? saith the Holy One. ISAIAH xl. 25.

IT would seem as if nothing more could be added to the monotheism of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yet there is further development, which takes the form of bringing out more fully the implications of the conception of God which already exists. We shall see in these remaining chapters how Israel's philosophy of history, which was born of the conviction that God had a special relation to, and purpose for, that one nation, broadened out into the vision of a world-wide purpose of God. The note of universalism sounds more loudly.

There is development, too, in another sense. Old ideas passing through new minds are vitalized ; and a prophet with insight and religious imagination may interpret them in fresh and living ways. This was the case with the great unknown prophet of the Exile,

whom we call Second Isaiah. The bulk of this chapter is concerned with him; and we shall see how in his hands monotheism became the doctrine of a God, intensely personal, intensely alive, transcendently supreme, yet coming very near to man in movements of tenderest affection.

Ezekiel and Second Isaiah are our subjects of study to-day; and that we may the better appreciate their teaching, we must set them against their historical background. Every prophet spoke primarily to his own age. It was the events of his own day which gave colour to his interpretation of God's purposes. To treat a prophet apart from his historical surroundings is to miss half the meaning of his message.

In 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and carried away into captivity the king Jehoiachin, and all the best elements of the nation. Ezekiel, who was of priestly family, was among the captives. He, with a band of exiles, was settled at Tel-Abib by the river Chebar. He tells us that he began to prophesy five years after the captivity of Jehoiachin. His work, therefore, lay among his own people in the land of Babylon.

Second Isaiah prophesied at the very close of the Exile. Cyrus the Persian king, after a career of conquest, captured Babylon in 538 B.C.

In the following year the Jews received permission to return to Palestine, and the first detachment of them made their way back under the leadership of Zerubbabel. This unknown prophet, whose works are bound up with those of Isaiah, prophesied somewhere between 549 and 538. Chapters xl.-lxvi. of the Book of Isaiah form a continuous prophecy dealing with the subject of the restoration of Israel from Babylon. The prophet's message is that God has not forgotten His promises. Deliverance is at hand. Cyrus, whom he names, is God's instrument for effecting His purpose of restoration. But though this latter portion of Isaiah form a continuous prophecy, the bulk of modern scholars agree that it is not all by one author. The question is a difficult one to decide; but critical opinion now leans to the belief that Chapters lvi.-lxvi. are of post-exilic date, and were written by a prophet living in Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah, about the middle of the fifth century. If this be so, then the Book of Isaiah, as we have it, is the work of three authors; the great Isaiah, who prophesied from 740 B.C. onwards, when the danger to Israel was from Assyria; an unknown prophet, writing just as the Exile was coming to an end; and a third

prophet, who wrote about a century later.

But it is enough for our present purpose if we remember that both Ezekiel and Second Isaiah were prophets of the Exile. The old national life had vanished. The catastrophe had profound effects upon religion. We are moving in new surroundings, and a new atmosphere.

Ezekiel need not detain us long. His doctrine of God is the same in general outline as that of Jeremiah, by whom he was much influenced, and of Second Isaiah. But he has his own special mode of writing, and the cast of his mind is priestly. The visions of God, which occur in the earlier parts of his prophecy, show that he emphasized the doctrines of the divine omnipresence and divine omniscience. God's chariot with its cherubim moves swiftly in all directions, and is full of eyes. God Himself sits on a throne above the firmament, omnipotent Ruler of all. He is the Lord Jehovah, in whose hands are the fates of all nations. He governs the nations and judges them. But for Ezekiel God is not a remote, transcendent Being. He is a Living God in active relation to the world. He is personal, and can feel moral emotion. He is called "jealous," which means that He is conscious of His own

transcendence and authority, and feels acutely the sin of man, which is a violation of His majesty and holiness. The prophet's insistence on the absolute supremacy of God leads him at times to say that the evil which is on earth flows from Him as its author.¹ He does not mean that God can cause an innocent person to sin by tempting him to evil. The men whose evil is referred to God are *evil* men, and they are not relieved of their responsibility. They do of their own free choice what the prophet says God does. God "uses sin already existing, punishes it with delusion and worse sin, laying a stumbling-block before the sinner, over which he falls and perishes."² Ezekiel's mind was profoundly reverential. He has such a lofty conception of God, and is so impressed with the insignificance of man, that he tends to make God the author of everything that happens in heaven and earth.

One other point may be mentioned. Ezekiel is full of the sense of a divine purpose operating in history. It operates most clearly in Israel, but what He does in Israel, and what He shows to Israel, is meant to be a lesson for the whole world. The nations are to see in the God of

¹ cp. xxiv. 7, 8; xiv. 9; xx. 25, 26; ² A. B. Davidson's *Ezekiel*, in Cambridge Bible, Introd. p. xxxvi.

Israel the true nature of God. Take such a verse as this: "And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity."¹ Israel would realize the meaning of the discipline; and the nation would realize it also. Similarly when God restores them He will be "sanctified in them in the sight of many nations."² This, however, is not the spirit of a true universalism. Ezekiel is a profoundly national prophet. And when at the end of his prophecy he sketches the picture of the restored community, a church-state fenced round with ritual barriers to preserve its purity, the nations drop out of sight. His attention is fixed on Israel alone. The prophet's ideal is an Israel purified and restored, who shall be worthy of the God who desires to make His dwelling among them.³

We pass now to Second Isaiah. In him absolute monotheism finds its truest and profoundest exponent.

1. Let us begin by thinking of him as a religious interpreter of history. All the prophets sought to make clear the lessons contained in the story of their nation. From Amos onwards God's rule in history is a prevailing theme.

¹ xxxix. 23; ² xxxix. 27; ³ but in xvi. 61, under the new covenant other cities and nationalities share in the divine blessing.

But none of his predecessors had Second Isaiah's clear vision of a predetermined purpose of God, which was being worked out in the field of history, and being worked out by the personal agency of God Himself. He comes to his interpretation of history from his conception of the absolute sovereignty of God. He does not argue that because certain things are happening in history, therefore there is a divine purpose behind them. But he begins with God, sovereign, purposeful, consistent in character, and sees God operating in political events. What is happening is a manifestation of God's power and character. Here is God in action. Here is the divine arm made bare. The active sovereignty of God is the pre-supposition from which he starts.

Chapter xli. is addressed to the heathen. "Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the peoples renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together in judgment." The argument takes the form of a trial at law. The idols are called to judgment. They are invited to state their case. Their case breaks down, and the verdict is given in favour of Yahweh as the only God. The core of the argument turns round the person of Cyrus the Persian king, though in this chapter he is not actually

mentioned by name, as he is later. "Who hath raised up one from the east, whom he calleth in righteousness to his foot? he giveth nations before him, and maketh him rule over kings."¹ "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last, I am he."² In Cyrus the prophet sees the agent of the redemption and restoration which God is to effect. Great events are coming to the birth. God is about to intervene for the salvation of his people. The prophet then challenges the heathen gods to predict the future. "Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods."³ Let them say what present events are going to produce. If they can rightly predict, then they are entitled to be heard. But there is none that can answer. "Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you."⁴ The prophet is not, of course, vindicating the supremacy of Yahweh merely on the ground that He can rightly predict. The power of prediction is a very minor element in his conception of deity. What he wants to show is that Yahweh is absolutely supreme, and that all history is

¹ xli. 2; ² xli. 4; ³ xli. 22, 23; ⁴ xli. 24.

under His governance. Israel from their long experience in the past should have known that Yahweh was a God of moral character and inflexible purpose, the controller of all events among all nations. He adduces the fact of the impotence of the heathen gods merely as a reminder to the people of the true character of the God of Israel. Some verses in Ch. xliii. sum up his contention :

“ Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen ; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he ; before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no saviour.”¹

We to-day perhaps tend to think of history as the field where great impersonal forces operate. Just because the scale of historical movements is so vast we find it difficult to believe that there is purpose at work. We may surely learn something from the unwavering assurance of the prophet. His conviction of the personal rule of God may help to reinforce our belief that all things are under divine control, and are moving to their appointed end.

2. Consider next Second Isaiah's portraiture of God in His unique and incomparable majesty. With what scorn and sarcasm does he attack

¹ xliii. 10, 11.

idolatry ! We recall the famous passage in Chapter xliv., where he describes the idol worshipper selecting a tree from the forest, nurturing it till it is ready for the axe. "Then shall it be for a man to burn ; and he taketh thereof and warmeth himself ; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread : yea, he maketh a god and worshippeth it ; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire : with part thereof he eateth flesh ; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied ; yea, he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire : and the residue thereof he maketh a god." ¹ This is his scathing verdict on the idolater : "He feedeth on ashes : a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ? " ² Israel, whatever its faults, and however much corruption had crept into the popular religion, stood far above the level of contemporary heathen faiths ; because its creed was monotheistic, and therefore its conception of God was at heart spiritual. In practical working idolatry degrades and debases.

The prophet in Ch. xl., which is an address to

¹ verses 15-17 ; ² verse 20.

Israel, turns to God's work in creation. "To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by name."¹ The solemnities of the midnight sky; the revelation of modern astronomy as to the immensity of the stellar universe; the marvel of the small, revealed by the microscope; the slow unfolding of a vast evolutionary plan, in which we cannot help seeing purpose—with how much greater force comes home to us to-day the sense of the majesty and sublimity of God! The prophet says of Him: "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing."² He spreads out the curtains of the heavens; the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers. He "bringeth princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity,"³ He is "the first," and "the last;" the "everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth."⁴

3. But the greatest achievement of this prophet is to show that this transcendent, incomparable God comes very near to men.

¹ 26; ² 15; ³ 23; ⁴ 28.

He is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ;" yet He dwells "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."¹ Let us see how he presents God to these poor and depressed exiles. We must remember their condition. All around them was a heathen power. There seemed no hope of deliverance. It looked as if God had "forgotten to be gracious," forgotten His promises of old. Depression and weariness of spirit had settled upon them like some black night of gloom. They said "my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed away from my God."² What was needed was a message of hope, which should renew their sense of God, their trust in Him, and their consciousness of their own mission as a people. Intellectual argument would not work this change. A sad heart is not refreshed by a syllogism. Very few wounded souls have been healed by metaphysics ; though a saintly bishop to whom I was ministering on his death-bed said that the source of greatest spiritual consolation to him had been the Athanasian Creed. No ; what was wanted was a presentation of God

¹ lvii. 15 ; ² xl. 27.

charged with passion, a presentation which should bring Him down from His throne above the stars to the flat plains of Babylon, where they were toiling and despairing ; which should show them that God loved them and really cared for them. This presentation he gives them. We may consider it under the following heads :

(a) The divine tenderness and pity. The first Isaiah, whose conception of God's transcendence is as majestic in essentials as that of the Second Isaiah, dwells on the sterner aspects of God. Kindness and love are never mentioned by him as qualities of Yahweh. Hosea, as we saw, is full of the thought of the divine compassion, and represents God's heart as being wounded by human sin. But it was left to Second Isaiah to bring out to the full the tenderer side of God's nature with exquisite feeling ; and in particular to show that the discipline of judgment which had fallen on Israel was only a stage in a purpose of grace. The word "comfort" often occurs in his writings. His prophecy begins : "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." Take passages such as these, and think what they must have meant to the exiles :

"In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer." ¹

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires." ²

"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that give suck." ³

God is tender, because He has this gracious purpose for Israel. He means to restore her. He says of Jerusalem : "She shall be inhabited" ; and of the cities of Judah : "They shall be built, and I will raise up the waste places thereof." ⁴

(b) The agonizing of God. No Old Testament prophet uses more vivid human speech of God. Human emotions are freely attributed to Him. He is presented as coming down into the arena of human struggle and sorrow, like a mighty warrior with a heart of compassion. How bold is the following : "I have long time holden my peace ; I have been still and refrained myself : now will I cry out like a travailing woman ; I will gasp and pant together." ⁵

"And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor ; therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him ; and his righteousness it upheld him. And he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head ; and he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke." ⁶

¹ liv. 8 ; ² liv. 11 ; ³ xl. 11 ; ⁴ xliv. 26 ; ⁵ xlii. 14 ; ⁶ lix. 16, 17.

Or, more beautiful than all, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." ¹

It is often charged against religion that it uses anthropomorphisms. But we have only human language, in which to describe God; and Jesus called him "Father." Such language is, of course, picture language; but it points to reality. It points to the fact that there is real kinship between God and man, that God has a heart and knows how to suffer. If God is Love, then He cannot be coldly indifferent to His children's sorrows. There must be in Him some real feeling of sympathy. Emphasis is being laid to-day upon the element of suffering in God. It is part of the movement of thought which stresses His immanence or nearness to creation. The heart demands a God who shall share with His creatures the burden of the world. But how God suffers, or what suffering really means to Him, who can say? One of the tasks which awaits theology and philosophy in the future is to effect some synthesis between the thought of God as transcendent, and the thought of Him as

¹ lxxiii. 9.

immanent in the time-process, and so sharing in the experience of his finite creation.

(c) The exiles, as we have seen, needed a presentation of God which should assure them that they were not forgotten. The prophet gives them this by the special emphasis which he lays upon the thought of God as righteous. To his use of this term we must now turn. The "righteousness" of God is mentioned very frequently in this prophecy. Here are some examples. "I have raised him (i.e. Cyrus) up in righteousness." ¹ Of Israel: "yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." ² Of God in His own character: "I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" ³; or again, "Who hath declared it from the beginning, that we may know and that we may say, He is righteous?" ⁴ It would involve a long and complicated enquiry to determine all the shades of meaning attaching to this conception of the righteousness of God. It will be enough for our purpose if we try to make clear to ourselves the main ideas connected with the word. The large, salient notion involved in the conception of God as righteous is that of consistency or trustworthiness. God

¹ xlv. 13; ² xli. 10; ³ xlv. 19; ⁴ xli. 26.

is perfectly to be trusted. His words and His deeds have nothing capricious about them. Deed corresponds to word. The righteousness of God is a way of saying that His purpose is consistent and inflexible. Now His purpose, as the prophet unfolds it, is concerned with Israel. He means to restore Israel. His purpose is redemptive. He is a God of salvation. Through Cyrus his agent, He will save them. Let them not fear. God has not forgotten His promises of old. The righteousness of God shows itself in wider regions than that of Israel's history ; but what is to happen to Israel will be a striking vindication and example of God's righteousness. Hence in the prophecy righteousness is mainly concerned with the thought of the coming salvation.

But righteousness is attributed also to Israel in this prophecy, not in the sense of moral goodness, for Israel had sinned, and her prophets were teaching that the exile was a punishment for her sins, but in the sense of having rights. The following passage from Robertson Smith's *Prophets of Israel* will help to explain what is meant :

“ The ideas of right and wrong among the Hebrews are forensic ideas ; that is, the Hebrew always thinks of the right and the wrong as if they were to be settled before a judge. Righteousness is to the Hebrew not so much a

moral quality as a legal status. The word 'righteous' means simply 'in the right,' and the word 'wicked' means 'in the wrong.'"¹

Hence you have the double idea of righteousness as being such a course of conduct as will satisfy a fair-minded judge; and of the legal status resulting from a favourable judicial sentence. Now clearly God as the righteous judge could not acquit Israel, for she had broken her covenant with Him. Yet Israel felt she had certain rights, which were being overlooked. What were these rights? They were inherent in that Covenant relationship which, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, lay at the very foundation of Israel's religion. God had of His free mercy entered into covenant with the nation. He had promised that He would be true to His part in the covenant. Israel, indeed, had violated her share in the covenant, but still her rights remained, because God was faithful. He was in honour bound to vindicate her cause against her heathen oppressors. Israel was in the wrong before God morally: she was in the right before God, provided God kept His promises under the covenant. This is the meaning of the complaint put into the mouth of the nation. "Why

¹ p. 71 f. quoted from Skinner's *Isaiah*, xl-lxvi., in Cambridge Bible, note p. 238.

sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment (my right) is passed away from my God? "Israel said, "God has utterly forgotten me, forgotten my covenant rights." "No," says the prophet, "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength."¹ Any rights that Israel had were there only because God was righteous, that is, consistent in His character, trustworthy, sure in His purposes. He had said that He would not finally throw over Israel. He was about to save them and redeem them.

Into many an exile's heart must surely have come a new ray of hope on hearing this message. What they wanted to be assured of was just this, that God still cared. Nor does the prophet deal merely in generalities. He presents God as interested in Israel's special situation, as about to intervene actively to save her; and about to intervene because His heart is overflowing with love for this sinning, yet repentant,

¹ xl. 27, 28, 29;

people of His choice. The divine purpose is sure, because God is righteous. It is not some vague purpose being worked out by the inscrutable laws of history. It is the purpose of a Person, stirred with the passion of love, the purpose of a God who is a Saviour, of One who feels intensely for His people, who moves in and through events with a gracious plan of redemption.¹

Such, then, is this prophet's thought of God, so far as it is possible to analyse into its component parts a conception so rich and living. Analysis can never do justice to the beauty and wonder of the presentation ; indeed, it may be said to spoil it. The only way in which we can appreciate the presentation is quietly to read over the prophecies, and grow into their spirit. We shall rise from our study feeling that here we have, not only absolute monotheism but a picture of the Living God, transcendent, personal, with complete perfection of moral being, actively carrying out a redemptive purpose for humanity.

¹ Nothing is said in this chapter about the important passages which deal with the conception of the Servant, and reach their climax in the section which treats of the Suffering Servant. These passages powerfully reinforce the thought of God as a Redeemer and help to emphasize His tenderness and Love. It will be best to consider this conception of the Servant in connection with the problem of the Messianic hope and the universalistic element in prophecy, which will occupy us in the next chapter.

Is this the last word of a theistic faith? Did Christianity add on anything more to the thought of God? Attempts are sometimes made to discredit the originality of Jesus by pointing out that everything which He taught about God had been said before by someone. But surely originality is not to be measured simply by the standard of whether or not the teacher propounds an idea which is absolutely new. There may be an originality of higher type, which consists in the fusion of existing conceptions into a fresh presentation. Homer, and Milton in *Paradise Lost*, were both dealing with old material; the one with floating traditional ballads, the other with a very familiar Bible story round which had gathered a cycle of theological doctrine. But can anyone say that they were not highly original? The old passing through their creative minds came out new and re-minted. Their imagination at work on this old material entirely transformed it. Their finished poems bear the incommunicable marks of genius and personality.

So it was with the teaching of Jesus about God. He was nurtured in the Old Testament Scriptures, and in particular upon the prophets. His teaching belongs to the prophetic rather than to the priestly tradition. But He dealt

with this old material with sovereign freedom, and gave the world a conception of the Father in Heaven, which had never been given it before. In two particulars He passed beyond Second Isaiah's thought of God. (i) In the first place He presented God as Love. This prophet had indeed done that, as had Hosea ; but neither of them had made Love the very essence of the divine nature. For them Love was one attribute of God among many other attributes. For Jesus Love was the determining factor in God's life ; and all His attributes were attributes of Love. He was just the " Father " in all His relationships with His creation. (ii) In the second place, though Isaiah brought God near to men in the sense that he proclaimed a God of redemptive purpose, with a passion at His heart for men's salvation ; though he showed that tenderness and forgiveness were essential elements of the Divine character ; his sense of the Divine majesty and transcendence and of the insignificance of man, prevents him from thinking of men as children of God with the right to move freely about their Father's house, in unfettered communion with their Father. But this assertion of the possibility of free interchange of fellowship between man and God lies at the

very heart of our Lord's thought of God. Man is to trust God completely; tell Him everything; talk with Him in prayer; and never doubt that the Father hears and cares. We have here a new presentation, charged with new power. Jesus sought to bring men into the presence of the Father and leave them there. He was able to present God in this way, because He had in this way experienced Him. All that our prophet had taught about God Jesus accepted and indeed reinforced. But he had a profounder vision, because He had a profounder experience.

CHAPTER XI

MESSIANIC PROPHECY

Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls ; concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. I PETER i. 9, 10.

IN these two remaining chapters we are to study Messianic prophecy and see what contributions it made to the doctrine of God in the Old Testament. But we must begin with a few preliminary considerations, which may serve as an introduction to our closer examination of the subject.

I. First, we must settle what is meant by Messianic prophecy. The phrase is used in both a narrower and a wider sense. In the narrower sense it refers to those prophecies which predict the coming of a Messiah, a personal figure envisaged as King, or King-Priest, or Redeemer. But it is impossible so to limit the phrase, because the coming of the Messiah involved the coming of the Messianic kingdom with its blessings ; and there is a large range of prophecy essentially Messianic in tone and colour, which deals with the kingdom, but

makes no mention of a personal Messiah. The King and the Kingdom cannot be separated. Messianic prophecy must then be held to include at least all those passages which refer to a coming time of blessing both spiritual and material.

But the moment we thus extend the meaning of the phrase we find ourselves compelled to give it a yet wider reference, because the specific movement of Messianic prophecy with its expectation of a coming kingdom of blessing is only part of the whole redemptive outlook of the Old Testament. There are many passages outside the prophetic literature which are golden with a hope of redemption. There are primitive germs of thought essentially Messianic in tone. From these Messianic prophecy grew ; and you cannot sever a tree from its roots if you wish to understand its course of development. We must therefore take Messianic prophecy in its widest aspect as including that whole forward-looking movement of redemptive expectation, which is so characteristic of Hebrew religion.

2. It is when we take this wider view that we are helped to realize the remarkable nature of Messianic prophecy. What are its salient features ? (i) In the first place it is a move-

ment showing definite continuity and growth, and extending over many centuries. Messianic prophecy is not a flash in the pan, the brilliant fancy of a few dreamers. It is an organism with a life of its own, advancing from less to more. Its structure is highly articulated ; its later conceptions grow out of the earlier. It is an achievement without parallel in the world of religion. (ii) In the second place, it is a movement intimately related to history. That God had some special purpose for their nation, that the events of their history were being overruled by Him, was the standing conviction of the Hebrews. Messianic prophecy, like all prophecy in the Old Testament, was conditioned by the movement of contemporary events, and took its colour from them. But the relation of Messianic prophecy to history is most clearly seen in connection with the fulfilment which that prophecy received in Jesus Christ. The undoubted facts are these. We have this striking movement with its prospective reference, its hope of a new and better kingdom, its fitful vision of an ideal Ruler and Redeemer. Then comes a pause, in which prophecy proper is silent, and apocalyptic takes its place. But in this apocalyptic the Messianic hope is intensified. It grows passionate with the desire

for its own fulfilment. Expectation becomes strained. And then upon the stage of history steps One, in whom meet all those lines of earlier hope ; One who proclaims the divine kingdom ; One who said that He came, not to destroy, but to fulfil the past. History has been defined as "philosophy taking its time," the eternal progressively manifesting itself in time. May we not say of this whole Messianic movement with its culmination in Christ that it is "redemption taking its time?"

3. This leads us to the last of our prolegomena. It is in Messianic prophecy that the element of prediction is most apparent. Time was when the prevailing conception of the prophet was that of a man marvellously inspired to see into the distant future, and foretell in detail what was going to happen. We realize to-day that the work of a prophet was something far wider than that ; that he was (to use a familiar phrase) a "forth-teller" rather than a "fore-teller" ; that he was the exponent of divine truth in its manifold bearing upon individual, national and social life. Certainly he predicts ; but what does he predict and how ? He predicts the coming of an ideal kingdom ; but as to when it is coming, or in what precise manner it will come, he knows not.

His descriptions of the kingdom are coloured by local circumstances. A contemporary crisis may lead him to say that the " day of the Lord " is at hand. The details in the pictures drawn by the different prophets vary. Each man draws his own sketch ; and it is to misconceive the nature of prophecy to look for detailed fulfilments. Some details may be fulfilled ; there is, for example, a striking resemblance between our Lord's Passion and the picture of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah liii. But prophetic prediction is not of detail, but of larger issues. It is the prediction of ideas and ideals to be embodied subsequently in a polity ; of a temper and spirit which shall regenerate society and individual lives ; of a Figure one day to be made historically real, who shall be the creative centre of a new redemptive movement. We make two mistakes if we do either of the following things ; (i) look for minute fulfilment of earlier predictions ; (ii) scour the Old Testament for a Christology, search meticulously for the Christ in the writings of men who had no vision of the Christ. The Christ is there in Old Testament prophecy. It is given to us, the heirs of the ages, from our vantage ground, where we can take " clear prospect " over the whole anticipatory move-

ment and its sequel, to see how these ancient prophets were speaking things larger than they knew, how there was a purpose of God at work all the while. But to search for types over-zealously, or de-humanize the prophets by making them extraordinary clairvoyants, is to lapse back into a view of inspiration which it is impossible to defend.

That there was prediction, and that there was design we may firmly believe. But we have to conceive of its mode of operation in different fashion from that in which it was conceived a century ago, when miracle and prophecy were held to be the two main apologetic props. Is not the change in our view of prophecy very like the change which has come over our view of the argument from design? In Paley's day the wonderful adaptation of each organism to its environment was regarded as proof of direct creative, designing activity. God made each species fully adapted to its surroundings. Then came the evolutionary theory, and Darwin's doctrine of natural selection, which dealt the deathblow to this older form of the argument from design. But design is still there. Only we look for it, not in the details of adaptation, but in the progressive movement of evolution itself. We see a growing purpose in the whole

march of life from the amœba to man. The end throws back its light upon the beginning ; and the beginning, out of which the end has grown, wins in value and significance. The whole process shines with teleological light. We are surer than ever that purpose is at work. So with prophecy. We can afford to give up the search for detailed cases of correspondence, because we have a clearer vision of what prophecy means and implies as a whole.

Let us now examine some of those pregnant, germinal conceptions which embody the Messianic hope in its earliest and most primitive form. These conceptions are embedded in a literature which is, of course, of much later date in origin ; but when the history of Israel began to be written, traditional matter of very early origin was incorporated. These primitive Messianic ideas, then, go back to a period far antecedent to the rise of the school of historical writers.¹

(a) We notice at the outset how there is a Messianic colouring in the stories of the Creation and the Fall. Man is given dominion over Nature ; the conception of a kingdom of humanity begins to emerge. Upon humanity

¹ I am indebted for help in this section to Briggs's *Messianic Prophecy*.

rests the divine blessing. And when sin enters the world and man falls, and the divine word goes out that there is to be perpetual warfare between the serpent and the seed of the woman, though it is true that nothing is actually said about the seed of the woman being victorious, we cannot help reading into the passage a redemptive meaning. Could a moral struggle of this kind be unending? Must not the strife ultimately be crowned with victory? Does not the character of God as moral goodness require that eventually His cause shall triumph?

(b) Noah and his family were saved in the ark from the judgment of the deluge, and to them is repeated the ancient command, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth," the earth which shall no longer be overwhelmed with a flood, but shall provide a stable home for mankind. And with Noah is enacted the first of the divine covenants, whose symbol is the rainbow. Noah's blessing of Shem follows: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. God enlarge Japheth, and let him (i.e. God) dwell in the tents of Shem."¹ God dwelling among men, a divine presence vouchsafed to humanity, that

¹ Genesis ix. 26, 27.

is the heart of the blessing. The sense of a gracious purpose of God is making itself felt.

(c) With Abraham the Messianic hope becomes more defined. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," ¹ is the promise made to him, a promise which Israel cherished in later days, as we can see from the words of Micah : "Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." ²

(d) Two ancient fragments belong to this cycle of Messianic ideas. One is the blessing of Jacob, probably part of a collection of national odes, in which the figure of Judah is exalted. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be." ³ Judah takes up the dominion promised to the seed of Abraham. The other fragment is the prophecy attributed to Balaam, "I see him but not now : I behold him, but not nigh : there shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of tumult." ⁴ Dimly looms up in the distance

¹ Genesis xxii. 18 ; ² vii. 20 ; ³ Genesis xlix. 10 ; ⁴ Numbers xxiv. 17.

the figure of some personal ruler in Israel, whose power shall extend over other nations.

(e) Moses may be described as a Messianic figure. He laid the foundations of Israel's national life. In the polity which he drew up we have the conception of a kingdom of human beings owning God as their Ruler. Israel, rescued from Egypt, was a chosen people. God had a purpose in store for them. It was a moral purpose as the giving of the law on Sinai testified. The God who had chosen Israel was a God of progressive revelation. He had described Himself to Moses at the burning bush under the name "I will be what I will be." And Moses held a unique position. He mediated God's will to the people. He is pictured as in constant communication with God, speaking and acting with authority. One specially interesting passage in connection with Moses occurs in Deuteronomy. Moses is reported as saying to the people, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken." ¹ This verse is, indeed, not definitely connected anywhere in the Old Testament with the person of the Messiah; but at the close of the prophetic

¹ xviii. 15.

period and later there was the expectation that a prophet would arise. Thus we read in Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come."¹ Such is the kind of background out of which Messianic prophecy grew. Through these early records runs a note of expectation, a sense of a future rich with promise. The outlines of the hope are as yet vague, but we feel that from the first the religion of Israel contained within it germs capable of development in a Messianic direction.

Messianic prophecy received a great impetus in the reign of David. It began then to take settled form. Its future growth was along the lines then laid down. It was very natural that it should be so, for the reign of David was a time of brilliant success ; of national expansion and consolidation ; of the unification of the nation with Jerusalem as the new capital ; of religious advance, when the ark was removed to the capital, and the city assumed its sacred character. Later writers looked back to David's reign as a kind of golden age. The reign and the monarch were idealized. It was an age of blessing, prophetic of still greater blessings

¹ iv. 5, the passage in I Maccabees xiv. 41, may be compared : "until then should arise a faithful prophet."

which were to come. In this connection the central feature is the prophecy of Nathan to David. Speaking of David's son who is to succeed him, Nathan puts into God's mouth these words :

“ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father and he shall be my son ; if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men ; but my mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee ; thy throne shall be established for ever.” ¹

Note the predictions contained in these words. (1) David's throne and house are to continue for ever ; (2) the title of “ son ” is bestowed upon the royal ruler. He is God's regent, holding his power and title from God. (3) A house of God will be built ; God will dwell there in Jerusalem as the place of His sanctuary. These three predictions link themselves to earlier expressions of the Messianic hope. Thus Balaam's prophecy of a sceptre and star arising out of Jacob is transferred to the Davidic house. The bestowal of sonship on the king as the representative of the nation follows from the original selection of the people, who were the firstborn of Yahweh. The dwelling of God in

¹ II Samuel vii. 11-16.

the temple completes the blessing of Shem, in which the promise was made that God would dwell in the tents of Shem.

The figure of the Davidic king thus comes into prominence ; and we can trace in the subsequent literature how successive monarchs were idealized in the light of this prophecy of Nathan, and were given superhuman qualities. Sometimes, as in Psalm ii. the king is portrayed as a victorious conqueror ; sometimes as a royal bridegroom wedding himself to a bride from the Gentile world,¹ once again as a King-Priest.² But in all the descriptions the King is more than a merely human figure. Round his humanity is a supernatural halo.

Some two centuries, then, before written prophecy began, the religion of this people is bright with the Messianic hopes which gathered themselves round the person of David and his house. In the story of Israel three great landmarks stand out ; three stars shine clear in the heaven above all the rest. They are, the call of Abraham and the divine promise made to him ; the deliverance of the people from Egypt, and the divine care which this event proved ; and the reign of David, seen through the receding past in the glowing colours

¹ Ps. xlv ; ² Ps. cx.

painted by the faith of historians, who were sure of this one thing, that God's redemptive purpose could not fail of accomplishment.

We come now to the Messianic hope in written prophecy. It takes various forms ; and we cannot treat it otherwise than as a whole composed of many elements, congruous in general idea and spirit, because all are based upon the fundamental thought of a redemptive activity of God. In connection with this hope we may distinguish three lines of movement. First, there is the conception of the coming kingdom. Secondly there is the expectation of some signal act of intervention by God Himself. Thirdly, specific predictions are made of a Messiah ; there is the expectation of the coming of a Person, who shall inaugurate the epoch of Messianic blessings.

1. The hope of the kingdom. The conception of the kingdom is the most permanent element in Messianic prophecy. National consciousness was strong in the Hebrews, and it was natural that their prophets should describe the ideal future in terms derived from their common experience. They envisaged a future in which there should be a kingdom of God on earth. It would be a kingdom of God because it would be based on justice, peace, righteousness and

the acknowledgment of God's rule. Of this kingdom Jerusalem would be the metropolis. Zion would be exalted as the spiritual centre of the world. Thus Isaiah says: "And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." ¹ We recall how Ezekiel ends his prophecies with drawing a picture of the rebuilt Temple standing in the middle of the restored Jerusalem, a centre of worship, a sanctuary of the divine presence.

A rich idea such as that of the kingdom naturally lends itself to varying imaginative treatment; and so we find that each prophet describes it in his own way. All agree that its advent will bring blessings. The blessings are both material and spiritual. The Book of Amos ends with a purely material description of the kingdom, which it is difficult to believe

¹ ii. 2, 3.

that Amos himself wrote, because he was a man of such clear moral vision. With him the spiritual and moral always had the primacy. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them."¹ How great the interval between that picture of a redolent and bountiful Nature and Jeremiah's "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."² The impulse of the prophet and the impulse of the poet have much in common. Both make use of the imagination, and exercise the faculty of vision. Both select from their experience elements which they combine into new wholes. If we remember that the poet is latent in the

¹ ix. 13, 14; ² xxxi. 31, 33.

prophet we shall do justice to the play of imagination in the latter, and shall be delivered from the temptation to interpret his writings in terms of the letter rather than of the spirit.

2. Divine intervention. This is a second strand which we may distinguish in Messianic prophecy; and it is of great importance, because, when prophecy proper ceased, its place was taken by apocalyptic; and the heart of apocalyptic is the expectation of some signal intervention in human affairs by God Himself, or by some agent appointed by Him. Apocalyptic literature flourished in the two centuries before Christ and in the century after His coming. The Gospels are saturated with apocalyptic ideas. Our Lord Himself made free use of apocalyptic language in His description of the coming of the end, and frequently quoted from the current apocalyptic literature. We cannot hope to understand the New Testament without some knowledge of the background of thought out of which it grew.

This apocalyptic literature was the product of a time when pessimism and faith were strangely combined. Much of Hebrew prophecy had looked for a coming of the Kingdom of God through the secular processes of history. For

the Jew they were not secular because all history was ruled by God. But there was the expectation that God would so order the march of historical events that the perfect kingdom would result. Time, however, went on, and the kingdom did not come ; the development of history seemed to be hostile to any realization of Jewish hopes. One conqueror after another held the nation in subjection. Assyria, resistless and remorseless, had broken up the northern kingdom. Judah was preserved, and the hope of a better time centred round the southern kingdom. Then came Babylon and the exile, and the break-up of the national life of Judah. Hope survived this shock and burst into new life when Cyrus allowed the exiles to return. But still they were a subject race under Persia. Then came Greek rule, and the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, when Judaism was saved only by the heroic resistance of the Maccabees. Finally Rome held Palestine in her grip. Can we wonder that the Jews, looking back upon the promises made of old to their nation, knowing that in religion they stood far above all their conquerors, proud of their past and of their nationality, should have despaired of ever seeing the advent of the kingdom unless God should directly

intervene from heaven ? Apocalyptic was born of the passionate demand that God should intervene to save the people of His choice and to punish their oppressors. We can see the passion in the literature when we recall the imagery used by the writers—the flame of judgment, the sword of vengeance, the heavens opening, the descent of the Messiah on the clouds ; a symbolism born of tumult and rebellion in the human heart.

What form does this thought of divine intervention take in the prophets ? It appears as the prediction of the “ Day of the Lord ” ; a day in which God Himself will come to set up His kingdom in the midst of His people. In the popular religion the Day of the Lord had become a day to be looked forward to with hope and an easy confidence. “ All will be well,” argued the people, “ God will never desert us. He will destroy our foes.” But the prophets, Amos in particular, with their intensity of moral vision, and their recognition of moral character in God, taught that the Day of the Lord was a day of judgment, not only upon Israel’s enemies, but on the unfaithful in Israel itself. Isaiah speaks of a purification of Jerusalem by “ the spirit of judgment and

by the spirit of burning.”¹ Joel says that the Day of the Lord “is great and very terrible ; and who can abide it ? ” ; and because of that he cries “rend your hearts and not your garments and turn unto the Lord your God.”² The prophets then moralize the conception of the Day of the Lord. They see in it a time of judgment and testing which only the faithful remnant will survive. But after the judgment comes the age of Messianic blessings. The storm-clouds pass away and the sun shines once more. To the judgment of God succeeds the graciousness of God.

3. The expectation of the Messiah. In conclusion let us glance briefly at this element in Messianic prophecy, which gives its name to the whole movement. The expectation of a personal Messiah is closely connected with the promise made to David and his house. The coming king is to be born of David’s line. The prophecy of Nathan had bestowed upon the king the title of “son.” Henceforth the king was to be regarded as in a special manner God’s regent on earth. Kingship in Israel was theocratic. The king ruled, not in his own right, but as selected by God, and as representing the people to God.

¹ iv. 4 ; ² ii. 11, 13.

Messianic prophecy in this narrower sense of the prediction of a personal Messiah is at its height in the time of Isaiah, when the Assyrian power was threatening Palestine. Politically the outlook for Israel seemed hopeless. Who could resist Assyria? But Isaiah confidently draws his picture of the ideal king who is to come; and Micah echoes his message. In the dark night of despair this new constellation appears in the heavens to bring hope and encouragement.

We note these points in connection with these predictions of the coming king. (*a*) First, he will be of the house of David. Isaiah says: "And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit";¹ and Micah says: "But thou Bethlehem Ephrathah (the Davidic city), which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."² (*b*) Secondly, the king will stand in a specially close relation to God, and God will give him in abundance the gifts of the Spirit. "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and

¹ xi. 1; ² v. 2.

understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”¹ “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”² (c) His reign will be one of peace and justice. “With righteousness will he judge the poor . . . righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.” Even the wild animals will forget their savagery; “the cow and the bear shall feed; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”³ But Messiah as a king of peace, inaugurating a time when men will “beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” though it is perhaps the prevailing conception, is not the only one. Messiah is also represented as an armed warrior, just as David had been a warrior, who because he had shed blood is represented as being forbidden to build the Temple.⁴ The introduction of an age of peace and blessing involved judgment upon the enemies of Yahweh. Peace was to be reached through conflict.

This idea of a Davidic King, so prominent in

¹ Isaiah xi. 2; ² Isaiah ix. 6; ³ Isaiah xi. 4, 5, 7; ⁴ I Chronicles xxviii. 3.

Isaiah and the prophets of the Assyrian period is found again later in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Thus Jeremiah writes: "Behold, the day is come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness."¹ In Ezekiel we read: "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it."²

After the return from exile ideas connected with the priesthood came into prominence. Israel conceives itself as a priestly nation. The restored community, anxious to prevent any contamination from heathendom affecting its life, fences itself round with ritual and ceremonial barriers. We have seen how Ezekiel ends his prophecies with a vision of the rebuilt Temple in the midst of the renovated city, and pictures the ordered worship of the people led

¹ xxiii. 5, 6; ² xxxiv. 23, 24

by their priests. This was the period when the Law became the guardian of the national life. In this post-exilic prophecy the picture of the Messianic King blends with the picture of the priest. In Zechariah Joshua the high-priest, and Zerubbabel the civil head of the returned exiles, are linked together as of equal dignity. Joshua stands before the angel of judgment clad in filthy raiment. He is given clean raiment and a mitre is set on his head. He is told that if he remains loyal to God, he, as representing Israel, shall have right of access to God's presence among the angels who form the heavenly court. And he is pictured as a prophecy of the coming Messiah. "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men which are a sign: for behold I will bring forth my servant the Branch."¹ This prophet makes priest and prince share the government: "the counsel of peace shall be between them both."² In Psalm cx, that battleground of the commentators, the psalm which, because our Lord quotes it in argument with the Pharisees as David's, has led to so much dispute over the question of the limitation of His knowledge—in this psalm the ideal

¹ iii. 8; ² vi. 13.

monarch is described as himself a priest. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedech." He is not a hereditary priest of Aaron's line, but receives the priesthood by special divine appointment. "In him the primeval unity of royalty and priesthood seen in the ancient priest-king of Salem reappears."¹ It is almost impossible to date the psalm. If it is late, it illustrates the tendency to think of the coming Messiah as a priest. If it belongs to the time of the monarchy it shows that, even when the kingly conception of the Messiah was in the ascendant, it was not without priestly colour.

Messianic prophecy witnesses to the belief in a redemptive activity of God. The transcendent God comes with gracious purpose very near to men. He is the Living God, the God of judgment and of salvation. He is the God of revelation, and His revelation is never complete. It moves from less to more. "The best is yet to be." He challenges human faith. He bids men trust Him. He creates a temper of spiritual expectation. He foreshadows dimly through these prophets His own fuller entrance into human life.

¹ Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, in Cambridge Bible, p. 661.

CHAPTER XII

THE SERVANT: JONAH AND UNIVERSALISM

He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.

ISAIAH liii. 11.

And the nations shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory.

ISAIAH lxii. 2.

IN this concluding chapter we have to trace the last stages in the development of the idea of God. Two main subjects will occupy our attention. First, we shall have to discuss the significance of the conception of the Servant of the Lord, which is brought before us in the writings of Second Isaiah. Secondly, this will lead us on to examine how far the Hebrew prophets succeeded in breaking away from a national conception of religion, and in interpreting the mission of Israel on universal lines. The idea of God which prophecy had reached, was, as we have seen, loftily monotheistic. Idols were nonentities; all history was under the control of the One Supreme Being. That Being possessed creative power and moral character. In addition, He was a God of purpose, who on the field of history, and through the instrumentality of

Israel, was working out a great redemptive design. The Figure of the Messiah has appeared upon the canvas. The future is bright with the hope of a coming kingdom of blessedness.

1. The Servant of the Lord. Let us now examine this conception of the Servant of the Lord, upon the elucidation of which scholars have spent immense labour. One problem may for our present purpose be set on one side ; the problem of whether all the passages in Second Isaiah which speak of the Servant are by Second Isaiah ; or whether any of them are. Many modern scholars are of opinion that we have here the work of a later writer which has been inserted into the writings of Second Isaiah. Other equally able scholars think that Second Isaiah wrote these passages, that they form a unity, and that the conception of the Servant is the natural climax and culmination of his teaching. This latter is the view which is here assumed to be correct.¹

There is, again, considerable dispute as to the interpretation to be put on the Servant. Is he a person or only a personification ? Does any historical figure of the past stand behind him if he is a person ; or had the prophet any

¹ The passages referring to the Servant are : xli. 8-20 ; xlii. 1-7 ; 18-end ; xliii. 5-10 ; xlix. 1-9 ; l. 4-10 ; lii. 13-liii. 12.

vision of a Redeemer coming in the future? This problem we cannot leave on one side. But in discussing it let us ever keep in mind the nature of prophecy. A prophet spoke and wrote dramatically and pictorially. To apply to him a logical test of rigid consistency is to turn poetry into prose. While he mused the fire kindled, and he spake with his tongue. He flung out his ideas as they came to him under the rush of emotion. We do an injustice to his creative genius if we seek to square its products to hard rules. At the same time it will be found that there are no such glaring inconsistencies in his treatment of the Servant as to make it impossible for us to see in it a harmonious development of idea.

Now the Servant was not a conception invented by this prophet. Jeremiah had called Israel by that name; "therefore fear not thou, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord."¹ Ezekiel had said "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant."² Our prophet in like manner calls the nation of Israel the servant of God: "But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend";³ or again, "Remember these things, O Jacob; and Israel,

¹ xxx. 10; ² xxxvii. 25; ³ xli. 8.

for thou art my servant.”¹ This then is our starting point. The nation as a whole is thought of as the Servant of God, called to do God’s will, called for a special divine service. This conception is in line with that of earlier teachers of Israel, who had always insisted that the nation stood in special relation to God, and had been selected by Him to be the recipient of a special revelation.

But in other Servant passages the title Servant is not applied to the nation as a whole, but to part of the nation. A distinction is drawn between the nation in its totality, which had failed to fulfil God’s purpose, and the fruitful nucleus, which had remained true to its calling. Thus we read “Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf as my messenger that I send?”² Here the nation as a whole is called blind and deaf. Yet the capacity for seeing and hearing is still there, and so the prophet says “Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.”³ Where did this capacity for seeing and hearing reside? In the faithful remnant; or, as some would say, in the ideal Israel, which was to be formed out of the mass of the nation. The distinction between the nation as a whole and

¹ xliv. 21; ² xlii. 19; ³ xliii. 8.

the loyal part of it is made abundantly clear in such a passage as the following : “ And now saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, and that Israel be gathered to him . . . yea, he saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel : I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles.” ¹ The servant is to “ raise up the tribes of Jacob.” He cannot therefore be Israel as a whole ; he must be part of Israel, who is to do this service for the nation. Sir G. Adam Smith points out how in the *Areopagitica* Milton in the earlier part of his treatise speaks of the nation of England as a whole, and then in a famous passage uses the word “ England ”—of “ the true genius of England realized in her enlightened and aspiring sons ” : “ Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself and shaking her invincible locks ; methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam.” ²

The conception of the Servant, then, narrows from the nation as a whole to a part of the nation. Does it narrow still further ? Does

¹ xlix. 5, 6 ; ² *The Book of Isaiah* xl-lxvi. pp. 258-259.

the personification become a Person ? In those wonderful verses in chapters lii. and liii. which describe the Suffering Servant had the prophet any vision of a Personal Redeemer ? Why should it be said that he had no such vision ? Earlier prophets had drawn pictures of a personal Messiah. Why should not this prophet have projected into the future a sketch of a single sufferer, who by his suffering was to redeem his nation ? We cannot say that he had any clear vision of the Christ ; prophecy does not consist in a clairvoyance which can read a distant future. But if he could pass from the nation as Servant to a portion of the nation as Servant, may he not have once again passed to the conception of an individual ? Note how in chapter liii. the Suffering Servant is distinguished from the individuals who compose the nation : “ all we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” ¹ Here you have one individual set over against other individuals. Note too, how parts of the description of the Suffering Servant seem to be appropriate only to a historical person. “ He was oppressed . . . by oppression and judgment he was taken

¹ liii. 6.

away ; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living ? ” ¹ Many scholars have argued that because this presentation seems to be in such historical colours, therefore the writer had in mind some definite martyr such as Jeremiah, and made use of his story to give point to his sketch.

This at any rate is certain, that we find, and shall continue to find it extremely difficult not to see an individual in the Suffering Servant, because of the remarkable fulfilment which this prophecy received in Jesus Christ. No one can deny that there was this fulfilment ; the Christian will not be disposed to deny that divine design is here manifested. Messianic prophecy as a whole received a fulfilment in principle and spirit in our Lord : this particular prophecy seems to be almost a direct forecast of His Passion.

Now what bearing has this picture of the Servant upon the conception of God in the Old Testament which we are discussing ? Surely it emphasizes the idea of divine redemptive action, of divine purpose for humanity. God freely calls and chooses Israel. God wants to use Israel for a spiritual purpose. The trans-

¹ liii. 8.

cendent God comes very near to the life of humanity. Men are to co-operate with God in a common task. That is what underlies the idea of the Servant. But the Servant suffers, and by his sufferings redeems others. We reach here the highest conception of God in the Old Testament.

We recall how Second Isaiah, with all his insistence upon the divine transcendence, yet pictures God as agonizing for men ; coming down into the struggle to help them ; with a heart full of tender pity. " In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them : in his love and in his pity he redeemed them ; and he bare them and carried them all the days of old." ¹

The Suffering Servant reveals yet more clearly the tenderness and sympathy of the divine heart. Suffering had been one of the standing problems of the Old Testament. Here we touch the high-water mark of the treatment of the problem in Hebrew literature. Suffering proves to be the instrument of redemption ; love's passive weapon by which hostility is disarmed. It is worth while to study more closely the movement of this passage. The Suffering Servant appears upon the scene. He

¹ lxiii. 9:

is marred in visage ; “ he hath no form nor comeliness ; and when we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.” His contemporaries looking at him, say : “ This cannot be our Redeemer. This is one ‘ stricken, smitten of God and afflicted,’ one undergoing a divine discipline for some past fault.” And so they reject him, maltreat him, kill him ! Later conscience awakes. They are haunted by that Figure. He was so patient under the blows and reproaches. “ He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth ; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb ; yea, he opened not his mouth.” And then the truth dawns on them. Conscience has stung them to penitence, has given them new vision. They see it all now and they say : “ Yes, this was our Redeemer after all.” “ Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed.” Love had conquered. Love by using love’s method had turned to its own advantage the very weapon that opposed it. The

patient Sufferer had proved the Redeemer.

We have here the perfect picture of vicarious suffering in its redemptive power. Does the New Testament add anything to it? Yes; it says that the Sufferer was God Himself. It sets a cross in the heart of God. It makes concrete Isaiah's teaching about the tenderness and agonizing of God. It gives historical clothing to an idea. It brings God in His redemptive suffering on to the very field of human history. "The Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" becomes the Lamb of God nailed to a cross on a low hill in Palestine. Thus is an eternal purpose actualized in time, and a window opened, through which men may look into the very heart of God.

Our prophet, then, in his doctrine of God, leads us, as we must all admit, to a hill of expectation from whose summit we look out into the future, waiting and watching for some further fulfilment of his teaching. This mysterious figure of the Suffering Servant is both a query and a challenge. It is an invitation as it were to God to explain more clearly His redemptive purpose. The query is answered and the challenge taken up in Jesus Christ.

2. We pass now to consider briefly the universalistic elements in Hebrew prophecy.

The failure of Israel is writ large on the page of history. The nation as a whole failed to turn its splendid theism into an instrument of world-wide service. We have of course to draw a distinction between the popular religion and the religion of the advanced teachers of the nation. Popular religion lagged far behind that of the prophets. But it remains a strange thing that after the Exile, when a religious revival and reconstruction took place, the religious leaders of that day should not have seen the universalism implicit in the prophetic teaching about God. The prophets, as we have seen, had reached a conception of God which could not really be confined within the limits of a narrow national religion. Nationalism had been outgrown as far as religion was concerned. And the national life had been shattered by the Exile. Yet the first thing which was done on the return from exile was to rebuild the state as a Church-State on narrow, exclusive lines. Gentiles were rigorously excluded. The Law came into prominence. Ecclesiastical barriers were set up ; and Israel, which was called to a world-wide mission, failed entirely to realize its vocation. Only one branch of the Jews came near to fulfilling their mission. The large colony of Egyptian

Jews were liberally treated by the Ptolemies. What was the result? They shared their culture with other nations, and in turn learned from them. As they sought to interpret their own faith to men of other creeds it became a richer thing for themselves.¹ It was at Alexandria that the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek—the version we call the LXX—and had a wide circulation. It was there that the fruitful fusion of Hebrew and Greek thought began, reaching its climax in Philo; a fusion which prepared the soil for the true universalism of Christianity. The Palestinian Jew remained narrow and conservative, hating the Gentiles; and when Christ came Jerusalem rejected Him.

But there were prophets and psalmists who saw a wider vision and understood something of Israel's "World Call." The following are some of the main passages which strike a universal note. We will deal shortly with these before discussing the Book of Jonah.

Micah, the younger contemporary of First Isaiah (728-708 B.C.) prophesies the conversion of the world through Zion. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples

¹ cp. Fairbairn's *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, pp. 253-257.

as dew from the Lord, as showers upon the grass.¹ “ And many nations shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob ; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths ; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” ²

Isaiah I takes up the same note of Zion becoming the world's spiritual metropolis, and pictures Assyria “ a people tall and smooth ” being brought as a present unto the Lord.³ And in a famous passage he predicts that Egypt and Assyria, Israel's two great enemies, shall unite with Israel in worshipping Israel's God. “ In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth ; for that the Lord of Hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.” ⁴

With this may be compared Psalm lxxxvii. which pictures a register being taken of the citizens of Zion, in which are inscribed the names of heathen. “ I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as among them that know me : behold Philistia, and Tyre, with

¹ v. 7 ; ² iv. 2 ; ³ xviii. 7 ; ⁴ xix. 24, 25.

Ethiopia ; this one was born there. Yea, of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one was born in her." ¹

Zephaniah (626-621 B.C.) predicts the universal disappearance of idols and the turning of the nations to Jehovah. "Men shall worship him, everyone from his place, even all the isles of the nations." ² Jeremiah's teaching about spiritual religion and personal responsibility implied, as we have seen, a true universalism. Because there was a natural relationship between the human soul and God, it must be that religion would ultimately broaden out from a national to a universal type. "O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of my affliction, unto thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth." ³

In Second Isaiah, in connection with the figure of the Servant, the note of universalism sounds loudly. Israel is charged with a mission of world-wide import. "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." ⁴ "It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel :

¹ vv. 4, 5 ; ² ii. 11 ; ³ xvi. 19 ; ⁴ xlii. 6.

I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth.”¹ “ Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”²

In the prophetic writings after the Exile we note a strain of true universalism in Haggai and Zechariah. The former pictures Zion as the world's religious centre, to which the “desirable things” of the nations shall be brought.³ The latter says that through the judgment which is come on them the nations will be brought to recognize Israel's God.⁴ But in this post-exilic period we trace a process of hardening. The Jew becomes more exclusive in his religion; the portion of the heathen is to be judgment. The Book of Malachi (440 B.C.) exalts the Law which became the thing which made Israel exclusive; but with it combines a spirit of universalism. “For from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same my name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of Hosts.”⁵

This brings us to the Book of Jonah, the most evangelical of all the Old Testament

¹ xlix. 6; ² lvi. 7; ³ ii. 7; ⁴ ii. 11, viii. 19-23; ⁵ i. 11.

books, the nearest in spirit to the Gospel, and breathing a broad and gracious universalism. The average reader of the Bible misses its significance because he begins to argue whether a whale could really have swallowed Jonah. The conservative apologist hunts the literature of travel for examples of men who have been swallowed by fishes or sea-monsters and have been preserved ; not seeing that the more parallel cases we can discover the less miraculous does Jonah's preservation appear ; and yet it is the miracle which he wishes to defend ! No book has suffered more from a literalist exegesis. Yet one has only to read it with open mind to see that it is not history but allegory, or a dramatic tale with a religious purpose. Can we, for instance, take as strict history the King of Nineveh's command that all the animals were to be made to fast, to be clothed in sack-cloth, and to " cry mightily to God ? "

There was a prophet called Jonah. He is mentioned in II Kings, xiv. 25 as a man who predicted that King Jeroboam II would recapture the territory he had lost between the Dead Sea and the Pass of Hamath. But the book does not claim to be written by Jonah, and all the evidence shows that it is a late book. It cannot be precisely dated. It was written

either in the fifth or fourth century B.C. during the very period when Israel was making itself exclusive, and hardening in its attitude to the heathen. And it was written with the definite purpose of protesting against that exclusiveness and of teaching that God's purpose of redemption was universal in its scope. There may have been a tradition that the historical Jonah went to Nineveh; but there is no evidence whatever that he did. We do not know why the author of the book took Jonah as his hero. Nor does it matter. What matters is that we should understand the book's message.

It is often charged against the scholars that they have invented the theory that the book is allegory and not history. But let us notice the following verse in Jeremiah. "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon . . . he hath cast me out."¹ Here you have the exile described as a monster swallowing Israel, and the return from exile (which of course Jeremiah did not witness, but predicted) as a casting out from the monster's mouth. It is this popular way of regarding the exile which the writer of Jonah

¹ li. 34.

has taken for the framework of his story.

In our story Jonah represents Israel. He is told to go to preach to heathen Nineveh. But he flies away from God, because he knows instinctively why God was sending him to Nineveh. God intended to be gracious to the heathen city, to give it a chance of repentance. "Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish ; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." ¹ The idea that salvation could extend to the heathen was intolerable to the proud, exclusive Jew. If Jonah represents Israel, the great fish (it is a misnomer to call it a whale) represents the exile, and Jonah vomited from the fish's mouth represents the return from exile. Jonah flies from God, tries to put the sea between himself and God. But God sends a tempest, and the boat in which he is a passenger is in danger. Jonah offers himself as a sacrifice for the saving of the ship and crew. He is cast overboard ; the storm ceases, and the ship comes safe to land. Now we may easily miss the exquisite art of this part of the story. No one has done more to bring it out than Sir G. Adam Smith in his section on Jonah in *The Book of the Twelve*

¹ iv. 2.

Prophets. The sailors who take Jonah as a passenger in their ship are heathen—the very class of people whom Jonah regarded as outside the pale of salvation. But it is they who teach him his lesson. The storm breaks in full fury. The mariners labour to reach the shore. They cast the cargo out of the ship. Each cries to his God for help. But it is useless. All are helpless in face of a common danger; and we can see Jonah and the hated heathen huddled on the dripping deck. Someone on board is bringing ill-luck. Let the lot be cast. It is cast and falls on Jonah, who then tells his story, how he was running away from God. What is to be done? the sailors ask. Jonah bids them throw him into the sea. But they refuse. Their humanity shines out; these despised heathen prove that at any rate they have tender hearts. They try all the harder to reach land, and only at the long last do they throw Jonah overboard. The sea then becomes quiet and they row to shore. “Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made vows.”¹ That was when the storm had ceased; but earlier they are represented as recognizing the sovereignty of Jonah’s God, “the God of heaven which

¹ i. 16.

hath made the sea and the dry land.”¹

Jonah, as Sir G. Adam Smith puts it, sees in these sailors “heathen turned to the fear of the Lord. All that he has fled to avoid happens then before his eyes, and through his own mediation.” Jonah’s conversion began, when moved by the generosity and native humanity of these heathen, he offers his life as a sacrifice for them.

Jonah goes to Nineveh at last, preaches, and sees the men of the city beginning to repent. It is too much for him ; he grows angry, and begs God to take away his life. God humours him, and we have the charming story of the gourd gladdening Jonah with its shade, and then suddenly withering away ; and of God’s gentle reproach, “Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow ; which came up in a night, and perished in a night ; and should not I have pity on Nineveh that great city ; wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand ; and also much cattle ? ”² We are left with the contrast between human need and ignorance and the overarching Love of God, which sees in every Ninevite a soul to be blessed and saved.

¹ i. 9 ; ² iv. 10, 11.

But this noble protest against exclusiveness, this indictment of the nation, and perhaps also of the prophetic order, for their blindness, fell on deaf ears. The broader faith which some of the exiles had reached in Babylon, as a result of their reflection upon the downfall of the national life withered away. Legalism and ecclesiasticism became dominant; and when He came, who announced the universal Fatherhood of God, and revealed the spiritual heart of true religion, the Jews could only crucify Him.

My task as Warburton Lecturer is ended. May I conclude by reminding you of what I have tried to do?

The constant aim of these lectures has been to show that Old Testament Theism is of vital importance for us to-day. We have not outgrown the central teaching of the prophets. Their message lives on. Stress has been laid on the importance of linking the Old and New Testaments together. They belong to one spiritual movement, and each throws light upon the other. The movement must be studied as a whole, must be read both backwards and forwards. So only can we appreciate it as a unity, organic in character, and instinct with growing life. We have followed in outline the development of Israel's faith from its primitive

beginnings to the splendid monotheism of the two Isaiahs, and have seen how each prophet in turn, from Amos onwards, contributed something to the glory of the whole. We have traced within the larger development of prophecy as a whole the special growth of Messianic prophecy. The figure of the Messiah appears upon the canvas projected into a future bright with redemptive hopes. Then comes a pause. Prophecy goes on, but declines in power and vision, save for a flash of illumination here and there. Its place is taken by Apocalyptic, which keeps alive, but in changed fashion, the Messianic expectation. At last appears One in whom the convergent lines of the past meet ; One who claims to be the fulfilment of Israel's past. The ancient prophecies of the Hebrew nation were His spiritual food. He accepted their theism. But their teaching, steeped in the alembic of His own pure soul, and made vital to Himself by an immediate experience of God, came out from His mind re-minted and re-valued, charged with a new and richer meaning, because blended with His own stainless intuition. If it was given to no prophet to see the Christ, it is certain that only in the light of Christ can we understand prophecy. " I am the Way, the Truth, and the

Life," a wider way than Israel's, yet continuous with it ; a fuller Truth than that of Isaiah or Jeremiah, yet taking up into itself all that was best in them ; and a Life in which, so the Christian believes, the Living God, who haunts the pages of the Old Testament, comes yet closer to the human children whom he loves.

THE END

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